

DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES
"IN"
IN SMALL CHURCH GROUPS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to discover ways that the democratic process can be effectively used in church administration, especially in small groups which make decisions. These same principles can be applied to other areas in the church such as classes, study groups, therapy groups, leadership training, and other activities where personal and group growth is desired. This study attempts to show that the democratic process is not only the best method for small groups in the church but also for policy decision-making by the entire congregation. If Halford Luccock was correct in stating that "all the great movements in Christianity have been based on the training of small groups,"¹ then a study of small groups in the church is valid. Herbert Thelan told one pastor: "The face-to-face group working on a problem is the meeting ground of personality and society."²

¹Halford E. Luccock, "The Gospel According to St. Mark Exposition." The Interpreter's Bible, VII, 686.

²Paul F. Douglass, The Group Workshop Way in the Church. (New York: Association Press, 1956), p. VII.

To accomplish the church's mission. A survey of local church operations indicates that some of the problems facing the churches are not theological division, doctrinal disputes or personality conflicts. The potential accomplishments of the local congregation are sometimes never realized because there is a lack of perception of what is taking place in the decision-making groups in the church. "Some institutions reflect the prevailing tendency toward disintegration" because they are full of internal weakness, while others have too much authoritarianism. When power is concentrated at the top, action is taken "without opportunities for those concerned to have anything to say about it."³ What is even more frightening is that the church, which seeks to create "genuine fellowships through which the grace of God can reach the participants, casting out fears, healing wounds and giving purpose and direction for life,"⁴ finds that many group members engage in activities as spectators, not understanding or sharing in the purposes of the group. Leaders are often unaware of what is happening in terms of the psychological-sociological dynamics of the group.

³George B. de Huszar, Practical Applications of Democracy. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1945), p. 16.

⁴Lee J. Gable, Encyclopedia for Church Group Leaders. (New York: Association Press, 1949), p. 227.

As churches grow larger in the expanding urban and suburban settings, problems arise, not from the size of the church, but from inadequate internal structures. Decentralization can take place within the larger whole as numerous small groups are formed and these operate in a democratic manner. By enabling participation through democratic action the sharp separations in such groups are lessened. The larger church does not need to be less efficient if it is internally structured to permit total participation. By joining men together in groups with warm, personal and satisfying relationships, the spirit and form of the institution changes from the "artificial up-down-system" that makes our churches so formal and verbal.⁵ If a large church succeeds in developing a number of small groups within itself, its numerous fellowship, study and service units -- are just as essentially "the church" as are its larger corporate meetings.

Another reason for this study relating to the mission of the church arises out of the problem of the local church's effectiveness in dealing with social problems. Recent controversy in many congregations over involvement in social issues raises the question of how differences can be resolved in the decision-making process without

⁵Huszar, op. cit., p. 17.

dividing congregations. The church can either be silent on social issues and be ineffective, or the church can handle such issues autocratically and cause dissatisfaction and division. Or the church can seek a different alternative which will help it face the issues, confront the differences realistically and find a solution democratically. I believe the democratic approach can help the congregations achieve social involvement without disunity.

To prepare leaders. Since understanding the use of the democratic process in small groups is a relatively recent development through research, many church leaders are vaguely familiar with the principles and procedures involved. It is hoped that this study will acquaint them with the advantages of this method and provide practical assistance in the application of the democratic way.

In the area of leadership we are all aware of the presence of autocratic leaders among lay and clergy personnel in our churches. The recent revival of the laity in which all members are recognized as ministers of Christ reaffirms that the future of the church is dependent on laymen learning and fulfilling the church's mission through active small groups inside and outside the institutional structures. To have the church truly involved in social issues, the laymen who are on the front lines will need to be prepared to act as the church.

Democracy in the church is weakened by the fact that business executives, individuals in private professional practice, and others who operate in their vocations as monarchs, carry over into the church life their habits, attitudes, and practices. The average church member, living in several authoritarian circles, dilutes the democratic process in the church as he carries non-democratic methods into the church. Even denominations that proclaim congregational government sometimes reflect all types of group procedures from autocracy to laissez-faire.

The central focus of this dissertation will be on the leaders of our churches, especially the pastors. As we rethink the role of the pastor in the local church in terms of the expanding concept of the lay ministry, it is urgent that the pastor understand and use his opportunities to build the democratic process into the life of the congregation. Through this study the minister may gain insight as to how he may be a more effective leader in a democratic way, thereby helping him to utilize the best of various approaches now used to conduct church business.

Some clergy operate as dictator-administrators either through ignorance of a better way or because of fear of the group's power. While some profess to operate in a democratic way, their position is more nearly that of a dictator. In our efforts to include the voice of the

laymen in more church decisions, the pastors who play dictator will need to come to a new self-understanding as well as a comprehension of the values of the democratic process in small groups.

The pastorates of many denominations are troubled by a high rate of turnover among ministers. A close examination of the reasons many pastors leave or are forced to leave often shows the inability of clergy and laity to practice and accept the principles of the democratic method. A greater dedication to this process might mean longer pastorates and greater accomplishments for the Kingdom.

The pastor, who spends a great deal of time with groups, must be especially aware of the psycho-social dynamics taking place in the group. His own role in groups where decisions are made should be analyzed. While some pastors see group and committee meetings as busy work, monotonous or frustrating, the alert pastor sees these experiences as vital opportunities to develop democratic thinking and acting in the life of individuals and the church. If the democratic process is followed in decision-making, the potentiality of all members is developed, freedom is preserved and cooperation takes place. By understanding the various types of leadership found in groups, the pastor is more ably prepared to deal with the autocratic or laissez-faire leader and to help him become a

democratic leader. This experience of the pastor also carries over into decision-making groups at higher levels of church structure and in community activities.

Further, there is a need for the pastor and lay leaders to understand not only the theoretical dynamics of the group process but also the procedures for practically implementing these in the making of decisions. A gap between belief and practice sometimes exists. This variance means that at times one procedure of leading may be used, when to be true to one's commitment, another should be applied. To be sure, emergency situations or urgent decisions may require that some steps in the democratic method may need to be abbreviated. If we realize that time may not be available for proper fact-gathering by group members, the opinion of the expert may be heavily relied upon with the group's approval. Mere knowledge of group dynamics does not insure that the members of the group will effectively use these dynamics.

A further reason relating to the leaders of the church involves the ecumenical age in which we live. It calls us to change through interaction with other Christians in many denominations. Usually the decisive plans for church unity are formulated by small groups of leaders. If unity is to come in these small face-to-face consultations and confrontations, pastors and denominational leaders must be aware of and skillful in the use of the

democratic procedures. In the present emphasis on "living room dialogues" by Catholics and Protestants in small group meetings, the democratic method alone will bring results which will satisfy both sides.

Leaders should be experienced in group procedures for another reason. Sometimes a few astute but autocratic leaders can "use" the democratic process to manipulate the group to their conclusions. Lacking a thorough understanding of the process, the group may feel that it has arrived at a democratic decision while it has in fact been manipulated. Training, practice and evaluation of the use of these skills will help prevent the misuse of the procedures, the developing habits of improper application, and the desire to abandon procedures which do not seem to work.

II. SOURCES

The sources used in this study are the basic research reports and theoretical studies, especially in the social-psychology field and the educational area, for as Harry Munro states, "The findings of psychology and sociology have a deep significance for the religious educator, in helping him to...work effectively with growing persons."⁶

⁶Harry C. Munro, Protestant Nurture. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1956), p. 57.

Most of the resources are recent and thereby reflect the current research done by others in the years since World War II. Those wishing to delve more deeply into the particular facets of the subject are referred to the bibliographical sources for in-depth coverage of the subject and related topics.

III. DEVELOPMENT

In developing this dissertation, it is the desire of the author to acquaint the reader with some of the basic principles of the group process as these are used by small groups for democratic decision-making. The study begins with a presentation of the theories, limitations and values of the democratic method to clarify the author's meaning of terms used later. Since a multitude of varying ideas exist as to what the democratic method is, a limiting definition will be stated. Once the theory is stated, and the limitations expressed, the values of the process will be given from the perspectives of education, psychology, sociology and theology.

A description of the procedures of the democratic process as used in small decision-making groups will be given next, offering practical help for leaders unfamiliar with group procedures. The role of the leader and members and their relationship to each other will be considered in

the next chapter. The final section will present specific helps for the pastor in using the democratic process in the local church.

CHAPTER II

THEORY OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

I. DEFINITION

Democracy has been defined in many different ways. Frank Haiman defines democracy as "a social process in which the group as a whole is self-governing...and in which all members of the group are equally represented in the making of collaborative decisions."¹ When differences arise which cannot be resolved, the decision goes to the numerical majority and the minority is expected to comply. The definition given by Mary Lyle finds democracy to be a quality of human relationships characterized by sharing in the setting of goals and of working toward them with respect for the individual.² D. M. Hall believes the democratic process to involve (a) freedom for all to speak, interact and communicate with all other members, (b) "one member - one vote", which provides for distribution of power and (c) leaders with limited power subject to review.³ The

¹Franklyn S. Haiman, Group Leadership and Democratic Action. (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 33.

²Mary S. Lyle, Adult Education for Democracy in Family Life. (Ames, Iowa: Collegiate Press, 1944), p. 122.

³D. M. Hall, Dynamics of Group Action. (Danville, Ill.: Interstate, 1964), pp. 86-7.

four ingredients of democracy which White and Lippitt found in their studies include: the rule of the group, the freedom of the individual (as much freedom as is practical), the responsibility of the individual to cooperate with and be concerned for the group, and finally concern with the development and the dignity of the individual.⁴ While it is true that democracy is an ideal hard to fulfill among imperfect human beings, it is a goal to be aimed at.⁵

To better understand what we mean by democratic process, a contrast with non-democratic methods can be drawn. The two methods competing with the democratic are the autocratic and the laissez-faire.

Autocracy or authoritarianism as used in this study refers to a social process in which the making of decisions for a group is placed in the hands of one individual who is presumed to be better able to decide what the group should believe and do. Once having made the decision, he directs the group members to that end, using methods of control suitable to his purpose.⁶

The laissez-faire form permits extreme freedom for each member to do as he sees fit. Without any real leader

⁴Ralph K. White and Ronald Lippitt, Autocracy and Democracy. (New York: Harper Bros., 1960) pp. 2-3.

⁵Herman Harrell Horne, The Democratic Philosophy of Education. (New York: Macmillan, 1932), p. 117.

⁶Hauman, op. cit., p. 29.

to follow, the group formulates no common goal. In this type of "rugged individualism" each member makes his own decision.

II. QUALITIES

Value of the individual. The first quality we discover is that under democratic circumstances the value of the individual is exalted, and his contribution to his social group is considered highly important and necessary. From the early town meetings where the individual spoke his mind to the vestry or board meetings in the local church, the democratic way of life upholds the conviction that what the average individual has to contribute to the group is necessary to make the group a success. Carlton Allen thinks that the democratic way produces

the man of magnanimous instinct, with a sense of the dignity of himself and others, free from the petty disproportions and ungenerous resentments which destroy dignity, and basing his uprightness in behaviour and conscientiousness in duty on the double obligation of respect for himself and consideration of others.⁷

If our definition of democracy is greater than political conceptions, then we realize that democracy is really the art of living together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation. All members of the group are to participate in the decision-making process if the group is to

⁷Carlton Kemp Allen, Democracy and the Individual. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 103.

reach the best possible decision. The contribution of each member is to share equal weight in the decision, the equality being in each man having a right to equal voice in the decision through a vote. Democracy is then definitely not passiveness but involvement.⁸

Equality of Rights. The second quality of this theory is the equality of rights of the individual members. That is not to say that all members are ever equal in their abilities. "Such a society cannot be where everybody is equal, for freedom means development, and human beings have varying capacities."⁹ If we take away the opportunity for man to be different, he loses his freedom. Each member of the group has the right to participate to the best of his ability in the decision-making process. As John Dewey has said, "The democratic faith in equality is the faith that each individual shall have the chance and opportunity to contribute whatever he is capable of contributing."¹⁰ It means that everyone will get something from the group but not all will receive the same. "Democracy's aim has to be to provide an opportunity for every individual to fulfill his destiny."¹¹

⁸White, op. cit., p. 229.

⁹George B. de Huszar, Practical Applications of Democracy. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1945), p. 125.

¹⁰Lyle, op. cit., p. 18.

¹¹Huszar, op. cit., p. 125.

Democracy is not to be thought of as a struggle between interest groups in which one wins and one loses. Unless all segments or persons in the group achieve some satisfaction from the decision finally arrived at, the security of the entire group may be undermined. "Implied in every true solution of a conflict of interest is the requirement that it must lead to more cooperation between citizens, not less."¹² All members of the group then have equal rights to satisfaction and to power through the vote. The discussion should be thought of as an effort to unite both sides.

Freedom. The next aspect of the democratic theory is that of freedom of the individual. Freedom as used here does not mean the absence of all restraint or the right to do as one pleases.¹³ But freedom is thought of as Kant would describe it, i.e., "one who is not dependent on the foresight of others."¹⁴ Each member of the group should be free to choose within the group's purpose an aim which will lead to desirable growth or worthwhile goals. He should be free to experiment with his ideas and development, having confidence in the experimental method as a valid one for

¹²Bruno Lasker, Democracy Through Discussion. (New York: Wilson, 1949), p. 17.

¹³Arthur D. Hollingshead, Guidance in Democratic Living. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1941), p. 15.

¹⁴Ibid.

arriving at decisions. "Freedom exists only in a pluralistic society, where individuals have a choice as to where they shall belong and what they shall do."¹⁵ This freedom includes the right to disagree with other members of the group. As Allen points out, if democracy is to preserve the principle of majority-quantity, "it follows that it must not only permit, but must encourage diversity of opinion and individuality."¹⁶ Minorities then have their rights under the democratic way.

The corollary of the majority principle is that those who have chosen to differ with the majority shall be "entitled to the respect and consideration from those whose opinion has prevailed."¹⁷ While the minority has no right to refuse action, which has been decided on by the majority, the minority is entitled to maintain its dissent, enjoying such exceptions and concessions which can be permitted by the majority without endangering the general policy which has been adopted. This freedom permits members of the group to think critically without rejection or penalty. This method assumes that there is a freedom to be creative, individually and as a group. It is assumed that people together

¹⁵Huszar, op. cit., p. 125.

¹⁶Allen, op. cit., p. 49.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 50.

have more resources than separately and therefore can work more creatively when stimulated by each other.¹⁸ As Lewis Mumford remarks:

The heretic and the unqualified amateur...unearth buried possibilities to which the orthodox, whether in science or theology, are either smugly indifferent or downright hostile. Without continuous appeal to private judgement, openmindedness would disappear.¹⁹

Groupness. The fourth quality in our definition is that of fraternity or groupness. While the individuals have freedom, they are also bound within the group by choice. By remaining in the group, they accept the group norms and the group rules for behavior. Interaction takes place but it is not in chaotic form. Such fraternity leads to cooperation, essential to democracy. Each one acts in the interests of the whole.²⁰ Out of this cooperation comes the spirit of compromise. The majority become less positive and arbitrary. The minority, though they may remain unconvinced, can at least accept the situation without an intolerable sacrifice of principle.

Interaction. Democratic thinking emphasizes the

¹⁸Robert R. Powell, Managing Church Business through Group Procedures. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 14.

¹⁹Lewis Mumford, The Condition of Man. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1944), p. 195.

²⁰Allen, op. cit., p. 50.

interaction which takes place between individuals. Powell discusses the building of mutual response bonds in the group. Interaction takes place between pairs of persons. By interacting with many persons, one at a time, the individual becomes part of the group. As these mutual response bonds increase in number, the effectiveness of the group increases proportionately.²¹ As man enters into the building of bonds, he becomes a participator, not a spectator.²² Participation in the group's decisions usually creates stronger identification with the group, and greater commitment to the jointly held goals.²³ "When people are involved in the development of plans, they are more willing to give time and effort to seeing the plans carried through."²⁴ This participation is positive in that "democracy is...essentially a spirit or an attitude,...of understanding, sympathy, and cooperation."²⁵ Competition between group members is lessened as participation increases. As cooperation develops, it will help to "strengthen fellowship, to relieve tensions, to resolve misunderstandings, to develop a common purpose, to engender

²¹Powell, op. cit., pp. 30f.

²²Horne, op. cit., p. 133.

²³White, op. cit., p. 272.

²⁴Powell, op. cit., p. 20.

²⁵Horne, op. cit., p. 112.

enthusiasm, to facilitate the integration of new information and plans, and to increase loyalty."²⁶

Integration. This cooperation leads to compromise by the members in order that they may achieve a common goal or aim. Integration of the group is thereby accomplished. That quality of integration, believes George B. de Huszar, prevents disintegration which paves the way for autocracy or dictatorship in the group.²⁷ He compares the conditions in Germany before Hitler's reign to be the problem of inaction in democracy. In small groups there may be talk-democracy or the ideal of democratic action but unless the members are skilled in putting democracy to work, the group may be led in dictator fashion.

Authority. A further aspect of the group's relation to the individual is that in a democratically-operated group, authority is still present. Harry Munro finds that democracy is not the absence of authority, for that would be anarchy, but it is the use of authority for the benefit and best interest of all the people.²⁸ The authority, therefore, rests not in any one individual or sub-group but in the action of

²⁶Powell, op. cit., p. 14.

²⁷Huszar, op. cit., p. 3.

²⁸Harry C. Munro, Protestant Nurture. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1956), p. 10.

the total group which reflects fairly the opinions of the individual members.

III. LIMITATIONS

In presenting the democratic theory, the positive qualities have been outlined. To be objective, the negative criticisms of democracy should be included. In listing these criticisms, an answer to them will also be given.

Authority lacking. White and Lippitt find that one of the disadvantages of the democratic way in decision-making groups is the lack of authority to insure sustained, coordinated action. In some relationships and situations such as handling personalities or emergencies or where the thing to be done is dangerous, difficult or even boring, some element of compulsion may be necessary to insure that it is done.²⁹ Of course, there is no guarantee that an autocratic leader will do what is necessary either. However, if proper leadership and responsibility exist in the group, the combined members will be the authority to take whatever action is needed.

Confusion of purposes. When the emphasis is placed on individual freedom and general participation, the result

²⁹White, op. cit., pp. 270-1.

is "often a confusion of counsels rather than a single definite goal."³⁰ Harold Munro points out that this confusion results when an authoritarian structured church group begins to use democratic methods. In such a situation, the dogmatic position of the church may be questioned to such an extent that the members, in accepting democracy, will reject the overhead authority of the church.³¹ Or the group, in accepting their combined wisdom as authority for them, may reject the authority of deity.

To answer this criticism, it can be pointed out that in the long run, as the group works through and develops its own goals, under able leadership, confusion should not result. Man, being finite, faces the danger of pride, division, and rebelliousness, but the group has resources for minimizing these. Groups working together within the larger religious structures should take seriously conclusions of other groups. When disagreement arises inter-group discussions should produce a larger consensus. One group may choose to limit its action for the benefit of the larger whole.

Too much talk. One of the repeated criticisms is that groups spend too much time discussing and thereby delay

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Munro, op. cit., pp. 58-9.

decisions. Sometimes critics speak of democracy as "elaborate machinery for doing nothing," or as the pooling of ignorance. The Harry Overstreets write:

we seem to find in the land a great weariness with the way in which we have all pooled our manifold ignorance through the discussion method, congratulating ourselves all the while on democratic tolerance.³²

While some critics would agree to the democratic process as a platform to exchange views, they frown on its use as a means of making group decisions.³³

This criticism also reflects an improper understanding or use of the democratic way. Ignorance need not exist if the members do research to discover the truth and are open to share their honest feelings. While it may take longer to arrive at the decision, the resulting satisfaction and interest generated, means it should be wiser and better accepted.

Research finds that because of the enthusiasm and support generated by the group process, less time is spent in implementation of the decision, thereby requiring less total time than the autocratic method.

Mediocre leaders. White and Lippitt discovered that in the democratic way, sometimes the group chose leaders

³²Harry A. and Bonaro W. Overstreet, Leaders for Adult Education. (New York: Norton, 1941), p. 26.

³³Lasker, op. cit., p. 54.

who were popular but not the best choice for the group. Popular leaders are prone not to do their best work for fear of losing the group's acclaim.³⁴ Leadership may go to the person seeking to control or who will make no demands on the group.

The democratic process offers a compensation for this danger in that the members themselves play the role of assistant leaders and may fill roles which the leader does not. Furthermore, democracy provides a procedure for changing leaders without the disorder and power conflict involved in changing autocratic leaders.

An artificial minority. Allen points out the danger that the majority in a democracy may be just an artificial creation of a ruling minority. As in revolutions, a few can impose their will on the apathetic majority. Democracy is such a complicated process that "the adroit, unscrupulous, or determined manipulation" of persons may "lead to results which have little or no relation to a General Will."³⁵ A strongly convinced few are able to present to the indifferent many what appears to be an accomplished fact, before the many realize the nature of the fact.

This danger is averted as leaders urge full partici-

³⁴White, op. cit., p. 271.

³⁵Allen, op. cit., p. 53.

pation, critical evaluation and honest expression of feeling.

These limitations may occur in some attempted uses of the democratic procedures. Because it is never possible to practice democracy perfectly, there will always be room for improvement. Groups are to strive after the ideal. These limitations are not found in the full and proper use of the democratic process. In light of these facts, the advantages overshadow the limitations to such an extent that, while groups should work to eliminate the difficulties possible, the method as a whole should be commended and practiced.

CHAPTER III

VALUES IN THE DEMOCRATIC GROUP PROCESS

I. EDUCATIONAL VALUES

Church leaders should have a special interest in using the type of group process that would produce the most learning. However, in some churches because of past habits, indifference caused by previous learning methods and autocratic leaders, the democratic process has been frequently ignored or violated. Educators feel the impact of John Dewey's philosophy that more learning takes place when decisions are made democratically. Experiments in recent years by leaders such as Kurt Lewin in the Research Center for Group Dynamics at the University of Michigan, Leland Bradford in the National Training Laboratories in Washington, D. C., and Kenneth Benne of the University of Illinois have stressed the educational value of the democratic method.¹ Yet many of our educational institutions continue to follow a basically authoritarian pattern. Our churches may be suffering from the fact that "the quality of human relations which a child learns emotionally in his intimate groups in his school years becomes his basis for behavior

¹Franklyn S. Haiman, Group Leadership and Democratic Action. (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 38.

in his adult years."² In the church schools with their volunteer teachers who have little training in group work, the autocratic method is more often used than the democratic. The children taught by the former method grow up practicing authoritarianism. Why do experts still insist that there is more educational value in the democratic process?

Interaction is encouraged. One reason for favoring the democratic way is because interaction is encouraged. As Bruno Lasker points out, discussion is the benefit which two or more persons can give to one another as they share together.³ In the process of interaction the logic of each participant is improved by his experience of sharing with others. The group serves as a sounding board upon which the individual member's ideas can be tried. The logic of the rest of the group will quickly point out any illogical thinking by the individual.⁴ At the same time, interaction encourages and permits the expression of contrary opinions. Kelley believes that this is good, to such an extent that

²Winifred E. Bain, et. al., Democracy in Education. (Washington: Association of Childhood Education, 1949), P. 8.

³Bruno Lasker, Democracy Through Discussion. (New York: Wilson, 1949), p. 185.

⁴L. Thomas Hopkins, Interaction: The Democratic Process. (Boston: Heath, 1941), p. 218.

"issues which are not controversial have little or no significance except as they throw light on controversial issues."⁵ When we try to keep controversy out of the group, we deny the learner that part of learning which could make the non-controversial meaningful. Controversy moves beyond the place where we deal only with known answers, giving members freedom to live and learn. To keep controversial issues away from the group is, according to Earl C. Kelley, "to suck the lifeblood out of learning."⁶

Communication is accelerated. Besides providing interaction, the democratic process is valuable as an educational method because it increases communication. We know that if members are to have meaningful relationships with other members, especially in small groups, communication is essential. "Without communication, the possibilities for a relationship become hopeless, the resources...for the relationship are no longer available."⁷ Earl Kelley and Marie Rasey agree with Reuel Howe that one of the crucial problems of our day is the inability of people to communicate, church people being no exception. In the process

⁵Earl C. Kelley and Marie I. Rasey, Education and the Nature of Man. (New York: Harper Bros., 1952), P. 114.

⁶Ibid., p. 114.

⁷Reuel L. Howe, Herein is Love. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1961), p. 99.

of communication a human being discovers to some degree what another person thinks, feels, and believes. Through communication "an individual's needs for others can be satisfied;" he draws upon the source of all growth except physical and he holds the "key to human relatedness."⁸ When people work together in a small group toward a common goal, they are experiencing the most effective type of communication. Thus church members can work toward achieving more of a common world through sharing and communion. To get knowledge, feelings, attitudes, and understanding from one human being to another is an important purpose of our churches; particularly helpful in this regard are the small groups.

Cooperation is developed. The democratic process has further value for education because it favors cooperation instead of competition. While group members may bring a competitive spirit from their training in other groups that operate autocratically, the democratic process can educate members to work together for a common goal. Since groups are made up of imperfect people we cannot expect each group member to be completely free of the competitive spirit, but the aim should be cooperation.

Goals are chosen. In the democratic process goals

⁸Kelley, op. cit., p. 78.

are chosen by the group and not the individual. Goals which come from the outside or decisions which are made before the group begins its work are artificial to the group. Usually they are resented and even rejected, though they may be good goals. In the democratic way, the goal is hammered out by interaction until a consensus is arrived at. The goal becomes the task to be accomplished. To keep democracy healthy, it must offer not only rewards but tasks selected by the members.⁹

These goals aid in unifying the purpose of the group. Earl Kelley and Marie Rasey see man as a unitary being living in a universe that seeks to be unified.¹⁰ As the group chooses a common goal it is being drawn to a oneness; unity moves it toward formative integration. As the group achieves more oneness of purpose, it also benefits each member in seeing the whole. Decisions which might have been made in consideration of only partial facts are more apt to be complete when a variety of contributors brings a wide range of facts to the scene.¹¹

Needs are met. One value found in a democratic

⁹Carleton Kemp Allen, Democracy and the Individual. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 19-20.

¹⁰Kelley, op. cit., p. 50f.

¹¹Hopkins, op. cit., p. 218.

method is the learning atmosphere generated by meeting the felt needs of the group. The real needs of the individuals are not overlooked in arriving at the decision as is often the case in the autocratic group. Instead, those needs are of utmost importance, thereby keeping the interest of the group high and meeting a real life situation of importance to the participants. As these needs are dealt with, the members may find release for greater learning.

Potential development is encouraged. In the democratic process the members are urged to contribute their best which is not true in the laissez-faire group. This has the value of providing the greatest possible resources for the group process, assures the total involvement of all participants and promises to develop the growth potential of all members. "To conceive of education as growth is to imply a democratic society."¹² No one holds back in fear or indifference. As more are involved, the emphasis is on doing, rather than theorizing, so that the group involves the total organism and accomplishes complete learning.¹³ The emphasis is not only on verbalizing, which brings some satisfaction, but also on doing, as a part of involving

¹²Herman Harrell Horne, The Democratic Philosophy of Education. (New York: Macmillan, 1932), p. 130.

¹³Kelley, op. cit., p. 146.

one's best. At times in the church, we urge persons to do their best but then control the situation so that their best is unacceptable. "The best opportunity, accompanied by responsibility for developing those capacities and talents which make up unique personalities, is provided by the democratic way of living."¹⁴

Evaluation receives encouragement. In the democratic process, evaluation is encouraged. This helps the group members learn by avoiding repetition of errors, sharing analysis of actions, and reinforcing good patterns of group action.

Freedom. We should not overlook the value of freedom as we find it in the democratic method; it demands complete freedom of mind -- freedom to think, to analyze, and to make decisions. This method of education should be so freely offered that the group will choose the democratic way above others. Democracy should not be forced or indoctrinated into a group. If it is not "the way of life that would be chosen by a free man, then there must be a better way of life."¹⁵ The individual's freedom experienced in the group is kept from becoming "rugged individualism" by the pressure of group influence.

¹⁴Mary S. Lyle, Adult Education for Democracy in Family Life. (Ames, Iowa: Collegiate Press, 1944), p. 9.

¹⁵Kelley, op. cit., p. 108.

Learn by doing. Finally, in the democratic process, there is learning that comes by doing. In the decision-making group, something is decided. Discussion becomes a means to an end and not an end in itself. The process is not theoretical but pragmatic; a program of action is arrived at. The "formless crowd encourages talk-democracy while the small group is the basic unit and generating power for do-democracy."¹⁶ The small group stimulates a synthesis of ideas and purposes, thereby producing action.

II. PSYCHOLOGICAL VALUES

In searching for methods of operation in the local church, one of our concerns should be the psychological values which would be most beneficial to all persons in the group. By studying how the group operates, we may understand better the psychological make-up of its members. "A rather full and quantitative picture of a person's behavior in various small group situations may illustrate fundamental aspects of his personality."¹⁷ The democratic process will shape the individuals and the psychological make-up of the group will determine how democratic it can be.

¹⁶George B. de Huszar, Practical Applications of Democracy. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1945), p. 21.

¹⁷Ralph K. White, and Ronald Lippitt, Autocracy and Democracy. (New York: Harper Bros., 1960), p. 174.

Psychological fulfillment. One of the objectives of any group should be the psychological fulfillment of each member's personality. Each person in the group should be seeking to understand his own personality in relationship to others. Leroy Day points out that a person's concept of himself grows out of his relations with others. Beginning in early infancy, the child gradually discovers himself as he sees himself reflected in life's experience with others. Later in life the person can evaluate his own behavior in terms of his own concept of himself.¹⁸ "Democracy aims to develop individuals who will contribute to the social order the fullest development of their personalities."¹⁹ As he lives with his fellowmen with a desire for mutual helpfulness, he cooperates for the fullest development of the personalities of others. In so doing, he fulfills himself. Leland Bradford calls to our attention that recent research shows that effective groups have at their core the purpose of "maximizing of the contribution of the individual and his personal worth in his relations with others and the developing ability to make further contributions."²⁰

¹⁸Leroy J. Day, Dynamic Christian Fellowship. (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1960), p. 11.

¹⁹Arthur D. Hollingshead, Guidance in Democratic Living. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1941), p. 50.

²⁰Leland Powers Bradford, Group Development. (Washington: National Training Laboratories -- National Education Association, 1961), p. 25.

Hollingshead presents the premise that "an educational program that is 'suited to a democracy' must have as its primary objective the development of personality."²¹ Even in decision-making groups, the members need to find opportunities for growth in all the aspects of their nature. Each group in the church should therefore be adding to the development of wholeness in the individual. Karen Horney wrote in Our Inner Conflicts about the nature of personality development:

Man has the capacity as well as the desire to develop his potentialities and become a decent human being,...these deteriorate if his relation to others and hence to himself is...disturbed.²²

The best psychological state is that "life in which this self-development can find the freest scope, consistent with the self-development of others."²³

Openness. A second psychological value in the democratic way is the attitude of openness. When cooperation replaces competition, all may share openly without fear. This means that members of the group are more likely to be openminded as others share. Thus, the freedom to speak in a democratic group includes the responsibility to listen when others speak. To arrive at a consensus we need to be

²¹Hollingshead, op. cit., p. 79.

²²Kelley, op. cit., p. 176.

²³Allen, op. cit., p. 75.

aware of the other person's point of view. "We cannot learn what is in others' minds, and think constructively with them, if their mouths are gagged, but neither can we do it if they are talking freely and we are too arrogant or too preoccupied to listen."²⁴ One of the weaknesses of any group where a decision is being made is that the listener is tempted to be planning his next statement instead of giving full attention to the speaker. Real democracy cannot emerge if each side is not really listening to the other. "If frankness, openness, and confidence exist, then attitudes are more satisfactory."²⁵ This openness provides the exploration which is leisurely, wondering, seeking, reality-centered and not self-centered. This democratic combination of listening while maintaining one's own point of view requires inner strength for a double mental focus. While one maintains the two ideas in focus, judgment is suspended. Facing the ambiguity of such a situation leads toward tolerance and broadmindedness.

Acceptance and confidence. The democratic process encourages self-acceptance and self-confidence. When small groups are autocratically controlled, even the outgoing persons do not always have a chance to participate and

²⁴White, op. cit., p. 224.

²⁵Huszar, op. cit., p. 99.

develop self-confidence. In the democratic group, the shy person is drawn out and encouraged. The atmosphere is conducive to security, which sets the stage for experimentation and growth in self-confidence in one's decision and ideas. The self-confidence that causes democracy to flourish is that which combines pride with humility, i.e., the kind of pride which urges a person to defend his point of view until the facts prove otherwise and the kind of humility that makes genuine listening possible. In the autocratic situation fear is present and confidence diminishes. The group in a democratic situation also experiences a growing self-confidence in its freedom to make errors without autocratic judgment.

Sometimes in thinking about self-confidence, members feel guilty about influencing another person. They think of democracy as avoiding any form of persuasion of another. White and Lippitt attack the idea that "a self-assertive influence of others is at least semi-autocratic."²⁶ Although some believe that in order to give complete freedom to others, they must themselves be passive, experiments proved that a large part of the member's role in democracy consisted of frankly influencing others. Without the element of influence or persuasiveness the participant may lean toward the laissez-faire state. When a group leader

²⁶White, op. cit., p. 229.

feels he is being democratic by letting the discussion wander far afield or by wasting time in arguments over non-essentials, he is not being democratic but laissez-faire.

Realism. In the democratic process, instead of putting weight on opinions of status-members, the group seeks to find the facts. White and Lippitt in their experiments found that the democratic leader was "strongly reality-oriented" in his information-giving, guiding suggestions, stimulation of self-direction, and promotion of creative group discussions.²⁷ When the group member becomes concerned, not only to promote his own ideas, but to test them against reality, he is showing psychological maturity.

Humility. White and Lippitt believe that another part of the psychological core of democracy is the freedom from status-mindedness.²⁸ By this they mean more than freedom from the equality-inequality frame of reference. When members are free to forget all questions of superiority, inferiority and equality except as these have some functional relation to what is going on, then they are free from status-mindedness. The strength of the leader is still present but the group does not think of it. While the laissez-faire leader abdicates or denies his role and the

²⁷Ibid., p. 231.

²⁸Ibid., p. 233f.

autocratic leader can never forget it, the democratic leader uses his position only when needed.

Desire for fairness. The ability to be fair, another psychological factor, may operate in the group which is not stifled by a strong competitive spirit. When a member of the group is completely dominated by the urge to assert himself in competition with other members of the group, then the psychological forces making for equality of rights and opportunities are defeated.

Extroversion. George de Huszar finds a psychological change taking place when the self-centered individual has his attention drawn to a problem to be solved by the group.²⁹ Gradually extroversion occurs without effort. The self-centered person becomes more responsible to others while the impractical extrovert achieves a sane responsiveness. This friendly attitude develops cooperation spontaneously as evidenced by increased conversation yet without disintegration into idle chatter. One experiment showed 47 per cent more feeling of "we-ness" than in the autocratic group. The autocratic group expressed 27 per cent more feeling of "I-ness" than in the democratic group.³⁰ This group feeling helps to create a sense of belongingness, a craving stronger

²⁹Huszar, op. cit., pp. 120, 121.

³⁰Ibid., p. 119.

than the craving to possess. Goodwill is created by the friendliness which in turn releases values already mentioned, such as self-confidence. In comparison with either laissez-faire or the aggressive reaction in autocracy, White and Lippitt found a higher level of friendliness in democracy.³¹ This psychological warmth seems to multiply in the democratic group as it rebounds from person to person. Murray Ross and Charles Hendry described this warmth as basic empathy, which increased the group's sense of oneness.

Friendliness also lessens the hostility among members of the group. One experiment showed that hostility was manifested 30 times more frequently in the autocratic group than in the democratic group. Kurt Lewin felt that the "aggressiveness was not directed openly against the autocrat ...but tended to find an outlet in the easy and less dangerous way of attacking a scapegoat."³²

These various psychological values of the democratic process of group life strongly support the thesis that this way is psychologically healthier for church members and will lead to sounder decision-making in small groups in the church. The democratic method is more in harmony with the basic psychological goals found in Christianity than are either of the other two methods presented. Psychotherapists such as

³¹White, op. cit., p. 241.

³²Huszar, op. cit., p. 118.

Freud and Carl Rogers have favored this method of attacking problems, adding support to the values given here.

III. SOCIOLOGICAL VALUES

Let us now turn to the social advantages of the democratic process. Man is a social creature or he is nothing. He is born into society and can never fulfill his possibilities outside of society. Other people become to him as essential as daily sustenance.³³ Sociology has done much to advance the understanding of interpersonal relationships in small groups. The democratic process offers social values to group members which the autocratic and laissez-faire methods do not.

Group consciousness. Group consciousness implies "a recognition on the part of the individuals of an identity of their interests with those of their associates."³⁴ Members of the group realize that only through combined efforts can they hope to solve common problems or obtain common goals. In a democratic group, the participants regard themselves as partners in a common enterprise, for society is "not a mere collection of individuals and groups but a series of relationships between them."³⁵ When decisions

³³Kelley, op. cit., p. 30.

³⁴Hollingshead, op. cit., p. 34.

³⁵Huszar, op. cit., p. 4.

or problems arise which are of great importance, strong feelings of group consciousness result. When the common goal diminishes or vanishes, the group may fall apart. One can observe the sense of group consciousness which exists by the frequency of the use of "we," "us," and "our" in the interaction of the group. A spirit of mutual helpfulness and a concern for the best interests of all, as has been mentioned previously, is another sign of the presence of group consciousness in members. Ashley Montagu reminds us that the nature of life can be expressed in one word, co-operation -- "the interaction between organisms for mutual support in such a way as to confer survival benefits on each other."³⁶

Social needs. Besides providing a sense of group consciousness, the democratic group also provides for the basic social needs of individuals. Primary among these is the need for social approval. In the free and open atmosphere of democracy the individual feels accepted by the members of the group. Human beings cannot survive alone but need the feeling of significance. "The way in which we pick up relationships with other human beings as they come into our sphere of comprehension will determine how successful we will be in the primary business of living."³⁷

³⁶Kelley, op. cit., p. 90.

³⁷Ibid., p. 49.

If a member of the group feels approved, he feels successful and secure. Secondary among his needs is that for activity, for finding a place in the world about him, for enlarging his environmental circle, and for meaningful significant influence.³⁸ In the small group he is exposed to new ideas, personalities, and opportunities for personal expansion and influence.

Goals chosen cooperatively. A further social value is that goals in the democratic group are arrived at by a total cooperative effort. Having a common aim deepens the sense of groupness and joins the strength of individuals into a powerful whole.³⁹ One and one do not just make two in groups but have an effect that produces more. As White and Lippitt found, group thinking in a genuine democratic discussion usually leads to conclusions that are truer and sounder than those of one person. The testing and winnowing of ideas will be more honest and thorough where fear and indifference are not present.⁴⁰

Knowledge of group life. In group life, participants gain an understanding of how group life is maintained.

³⁸Hollingshead, op. cit., p. 56.

³⁹Ibid., p. 37.

⁴⁰White, op. cit., p. 290.

The experience of being a part of a democratic group will carry over into other areas of participants' lives, thereby, spreading the social value they have achieved. The knowledge of how to live with others, how to balance personal freedom with self-control for the group's benefit, provides a major contribution to a basic social problem. In group life, social control diminishes self-centeredness and helps individuals to solve the question of how one man can enjoy freedom without subtracting from the freedom of another.⁴¹ By being active in a group, a person learns how the group helps him to enjoy a limited freedom.

Self-presentation. The group also benefits as members learn how to present themselves and their ideas to others. As members learn how to participate in the group process and to maintain the group by their actions, the social value of the group process is expressed. Where authoritarian control is evident or where laissez-faire chaos is present, members find it very difficult to express themselves easily.

Morale. The superior morale found in the democratic group is another sociological value. The members contribute to this morale by helping others get their points of view across, even at sacrifice of their own. Members take

⁴¹Allen, op. cit., p. 80.

on roles of interpreters, encouragers and stimulators to assist weaker members reach their full potential of giving. Allen has observed that the highest faculties of men must lead not to a mere progression of power but to the good and right.⁴² As group members mature, they learn that gaining power in the group is not as satisfying as helping one another.

Relation of small to large groups. As has been pointed out previously, small group life is usually related to a larger institution or society. These institutions are related to the larger masses of society. Just as individuals influence each other in the small group, so the small groups help to change the large group. An individual then has a voice in changing society as he works through small groups, even as society influences him as he meets segments of it in the small group. As urbanization increases and the voice of the individual is lost in the mass, impersonalized society, the small group offers a realistic avenue of influence for man.

As one considers the role of the church in facing social issues, instead of feeling that the situation of trying to change society is hopeless, using one's influence through small groups can be a realistic means of causing

⁴²Ibid., p. 76.

change to occur.

IV. THEOLOGICAL VALUES

The theological values offered by the democratic process are of particular interest because of the use of this method in church structures. They provide a deeper dimension to the social decisions that face us, both inside and outside the church.

Protestantism has not been unfamiliar with the democratic way. However, the recent period in which the democratic approach to Christian education has been emphasized, has been marked by wide conflict, economic depression and revolution. Under such conditions democratic approaches have not always had a fair chance to show their strengths. During such periods of insecurity, the masses retreat into the security of authoritarianism. Bruno Lasker believes that because persons feared to confront the personal perplexities and individual responsibilities involved in democratic living, they chose authoritarian structures.⁴³ Against this tide,

the movement toward democratic, liberal, and creative thinking and attitudes in religion has been reasserting the original principles of Protestantism in terms of religious concepts which were at home in a world of scientific inquiry and intellectual freedom.⁴⁴

⁴³Lasker, op. cit., p. 54.

⁴⁴Ibid.

Seeking the will of God. The main theological reason which Robert Powell finds for using group procedures in the church relates to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ He describes the Holy Spirit as the experience of God and man reaching toward each other. The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost was a group experience. Central to the experience were two relationships, that of God to man and that of man to man. In and through the church, God's Spirit seeks to reveal His will through individuals and groups.

Some claim that it is the prophetic individual who carries the radical message of God's will to the group but that the group usually resists the message. As issues, such as modern social dilemmas become more complex, the perception of prophetic individuals is more difficult to acquire. Here the value of the group enters in. Often God's will is better heard through the voices of the combined members, although even this at times may be prejudiced. Our changing society may make it necessary to think more of prophetic groups and less of prophetic individuals. In the civil rights movements, only when the individual has been backed by some group, has the prophetic voice been most clearly heard.

Group process then is not a "gimmick" but expresses

⁴⁵Robert R. Powell, Managing Church Business Through Group Procedures. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 26.

"sincere efforts to enter into the process God has ordained for communication between man and man, and between man and God."⁴⁶

In seeking to do the will of God, the group members recognize and accept His will as being best for the group. As the members work together to understand that will through their combined intelligence and inspiration, giving allegiance to that transcendent will does not nullify the democratic process because the group has agreed on that will as their goal. Since that will does not coerce the group but must be freely accepted, it does not violate the group process.

Herman Horne believes that "a democratized society is similar to but not identical with the religious conception of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth."⁴⁷ In direction, the two are close together, even though they must never be completely identified.

The democratic society seeks to fulfill the will of God in bringing expression to the concept of the brotherhood of man.

Unity of God's creation. The democratic process also affirms one implication of the unity of God's creation.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁷Horne, op. cit., p. 113.

The unifying principle of Earl Kelley and Marie Rasey as part of the democratic approach has been previously referred to. As the group seeks unity of purpose and common goal, it is fitting into the theological plan of God that "all might be one." This oneness is often described in terms of fellowship in the church. The church's work is a means of building Christian fellowship whether in small groups or large. In Ephesians 4:1-16, Christians are asked to use their talents for the sake of the Christian fellowship. The gifts of ability Christians hold are not for their limited use but for the benefit of the whole. Romans 12:4-6a emphasizes the same point, unity in Christian fellowship. What these Scriptures ask for is not uniformity but unity of purpose that makes for unity of spirit, for morale.⁴⁸ While some churches favor Koinoinia groups, prayer meetings and the like for spiritual growth, Robert Powell believes that church members ought to find the same depth of fellowship and spiritual growth in their decision-making meetings. "Fellowship that is deep and genuine comes as a by-product of joint efforts on matters that have to do with the work of the Kingdom, and this includes the business affairs of the local church."⁴⁹

Even in terms of inter-faith unity, the democratic

⁴⁸ Powell, op. cit., pp. 22, 23.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

process can help. Religious education has accepted as a primary role that of developing attitudes based on the recognition that people in different faiths, as they work for the good, have more in common than they have in dispute.⁵⁰

The nature of man. The democratic method has theological value in dealing honestly with the nature of man, in accepting his potentialities as a child of God and being aware of his human frailties.

We cannot overlook the value or dignity of the human being which democracy assumes in the group. Harry Munro believes that the principles of democracy are "based on the dignity and worth of the individual person as a child of God."⁵¹ Democracy is a way one person regards another, and that regard arises out of the individual's relation to God. If we leave God out of the picture, democracy's essence is gone. Christianity has announced to the world "the inalienable dignity of every soul fashioned in the image of God."⁵² Ross Snyder prefers the Ephesian picture of the church:

⁵⁰Lasker, op. cit., p. 5.

⁵¹Harry C. Munro, Protestant Nurture. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1956), p. 15.

⁵²Jacques Maritain, Christianity and Democracy. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 44.

So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. (Ephesians 2:19) ⁵³

We find this principle of the inherent worth of persons expounded by George Albert Coe who called it the "personality principle" and credited it directly to Jesus.⁵⁴ In 1942, Henry A. Wallace, then Vice-President of the United States, declared that "the idea of freedom...is derived from the Bible with its extraordinary emphasis on the dignity of the individual."⁵⁵ As the democratic process lifts man to his rightful place as a child of God, it has theological value.

As one considers the nature of man, the fact of man's sin cannot be by-passed. The democratic process provides procedures for dealing with man's potentialities for evil as he is subject to the group's power. In the laissez-faire method, man is permitted to unleash his selfishness in "rugged individualism", while in the autocratic system, his capacity for good may be suppressed. If he is the leader in the autocratic method, his tendency to dominate others would have free reign. The democratic method tends to strike a better balance between freedom and control.

⁵³Ross Snyder, "Members One of Another...An Idea Whose Fullness of Time Has Come." International Journal of Religious Education, XXXIII:9, (May, 1957), 8.

⁵⁴Munro, op. cit., p. 57.

⁵⁵Maritain, op. cit., p. 59.

In the democratic process, stress is laid on the equal worth of persons who are to be given equal opportunity. Jacques Maritain finds man awakened to a consciousness of himself by the movement of civilization and knowing that the day has dawned for the common man, realizes that he must give up the idea of a ruling group and give way to the concept of a community of free men, equal in rights.⁵⁶ There has never been a time in the history of Christianity, says Carleton Allen, when the equality of souls has not been a fundamental article of faith.⁵⁷ Christianity has been the religion of the common man and the "hope of the depressed classes caught in the toils of status."⁵⁸

The norm of love. As men relate to one another in group life based on democracy, with concern for each other, the appropriation of Christian love in their relationships is obvious. Such relationship is not found in the authoritarian group dominated by the leader or in the laissez-faire group so long as each is interested in himself. In the Christian group, men see themselves as brothers because they are children of the same God. All that has been said in this thesis about mutual respect, concern for the

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 49.

⁵⁷Allen, op. cit., p. 12.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 13.

individual's development, assisting each other in expressing feelings, accepting hostility, and honesty with each other relates to the norm of love which guides the Christian group.

In love, competition gives way to cooperation because each member cares for the other as he cares for himself. The super-ordinate goal of fulfilling the purposes of a loving God joins all efforts in a higher cause.

Freedom. In the democratic process we find also the value of individual freedom, yet not unlimited freedom. Man has free will so that he need not bow to any master save God. But he also lives under the "law" which the community creates cooperatively. Man is free to be himself in the bounds of his responsibility to the group. Complete free will would be the way of laissez-faire process. Autocracy could mean the loss of some or all freedoms. The democratic way balances freedom and control by making each responsible to the group.

As man becomes responsible in the use of his abilities, then he fulfills the requirements of Christian stewardship. Power, whether in talents or possessions, is used in light of the group goal instead of for only personal ambitions. In the church, as the democratic method becomes accepted and used, the whole concept of stewardship will be enriched and strengthened.

In this freedom, primacy is put on inner personal and spiritual values rather than on material and structural values. Robert Powell interprets this in terms of personal Christian growth.⁵⁹ In democracy, such theological values are more nearly fulfilled.

⁵⁹Powell, op. cit., p. 24f.

CHAPTER IV

DECISION-MAKING PROCEDURES IN THE DEMOCRATIC GROUP

As our focus centers now on the specific procedures involved in decision-making in the democratic group, there must of necessity be some overlap with the foregoing chapters. Yet further elaboration of concrete methods is necessary. Robert Powell defines these procedures as "methods of leading meetings that encourage interactions between people and participation on the part of each member in the deliberations."¹ Such procedures encouraging participation express the essentials of the democratic theory.

The types of groups to which reference is made in this study are the policy-making and action groups in the church. These groups usually deal with some assigned problems or management decisions, or they may exist for making recommendations to a larger group. Persons in these recommending groups are usually elected or appointed, attending out of a sense of duty rather than from a desire to experience any personal growth. These bodies, however, often can provide many opportunities for personal interaction and fellowship despite their business purpose. Because of the

¹Robert Powell, Managing Church Business through Group Procedures. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 13.

responsibility which these groups have placed on them, the member's role is more serious, for the consequences of their decisions may affect many lives. Because of the structure involved in such groups and the speed at which they must sometimes operate, democratic procedures are often curtailed or inhibited when rules of operation take precedence over the preferred method.² Groups which decide policy or make recommendations include committees which are usually sub-groups of the larger organizations, conferences which are set up to study issues and establish policies which may be binding on their parent bodies, and boards or councils which act for their constituents.³ When controversial social matters arise in the church, for example, the final decision usually rests with one of these groups. The effectiveness of a local church in the area of social action often depends on whether or not it can deal creatively with issues at this level.

I. PREPARING THE SETTING

One of the procedures necessary to getting the group off to the right start is to properly prepare the physical

²William E. Utterback, Group Thinking and Conference Leadership. (New York: Rinehart, 1951), pp. 26, 27.

³Halbert E. Gulley, Discussion, Conference and Group Process. (New York: Holt, 1960), pp. 32-34.

setting for the group session. A favorable environment is conducive to group discussion. A setting free from distractions, comfortable physically, thereby encouraging interaction, will increase the efficiency of the group.

Proper size is another factor in establishing a group. While the size of the group may vary depending on its purpose, usually a group of ten or twelve is recommended as most efficient. This size offers possibility for consensus, intensity of face-to-face contact, and maximum individual participation.⁴ Experience shows that in church life, groups of four or five lack an adequate variety of experiences and personal contributions. Such a group is apt to be dominated by one person. Larger groups, on the other hand, while sometimes necessary to give full democratic representation, do not allow the same opportunity for participation in interaction.

II. PREPARING THE GROUP

Before a cluster of individuals can begin to act as a group, they must first come together and be trained to operate in the democratic way. It is assumed first that the group voluntarily wants to follow that pattern. If the group is willing, the first step has been taken. This

⁴George B. de Huszar, Practical Applications of Democracy. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1945), p. 24.

desire must be preceded by an adequate period for motivation and education. Unless all participants are informed and interested in the process, it cannot be successful. While a thorough discussion of the group's attitudes toward the democratic process is necessary to clarify any information or misunderstanding about how the democratic process works, all participants must be willing to try to use it. Even when members fully understand the methods intellectually, they may be emotionally tied to authoritarian attitudes, or may even be unaware of the effect of unconscious feelings about the democratic group process.

Some may object to using the democratic procedures in decision-making, even though they have accepted its use in other types of groups. Previous frustrations in using this method to arrive at decisions, may influence some to prefer the autocratic system. As Halbert E. Gulley has said, some believe it "does not follow that many need only to get together and talk things over, and anything at all can be worked out."⁵ As various processes are compared in discussion by the group, the members need to feel convinced that the democratic way is more efficient than the authoritarian or laissez-faire methods. At the same time, any

⁵Gulley, op. cit., p. 364.

false optimism about the democratic way should be dealt with, so that members will not expect a quick, easy solution or become discouraged by the extra time spent.

In arriving at acceptance of this method, the group members will need to consider several questions. What is the magnitude of the decision? How many persons will it affect? Is this a major or minor problem in church life? How much money or time is involved in the decision? How far-reaching will the decision be?⁶ Will it set a precedent? These and other questions will need to be thought out carefully. The relative importance of the decision will determine how much information is needed, how many should be involved in the decision, and how many hours should be given to the discussion.⁷ The members may disagree as to the level of importance of the problem to the degree that they may be more or less personally involved in the situation.

Various types of decisions include the simple "yes" or "no" decisions, which have a finality to them. These may be given flexibility by adding conditions to the "yes" or "no" solution. Because social action questions are usually complex, they usually necessitate several conditions.

⁶Lambert J. Case, How to Reach Group Decisions. (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1958), p. 12.

⁷Ibid., p. 13.

Another type involves the financial matters of the church, usually divided between "income" and "expense" questions. This author does not agree with Lambert J. Case who believes that the visionary or idealistic person should not be allowed on financial committees but should be put on program or education committees.⁸ That would destroy the democratic process and the balance and interaction between business-minded practical persons and persons of vision. Controversy over social issues is apt to occur between these two types of persons. Therefore, they should be together to work it out democratically. A third decision-making group includes ways and means of raising funds. A fourth type concerns decisions about problems.⁹ Social action concerns might be included in this area as well for they bring up questions of how the group can work together on controversial matters. When the group has decided which type of decision they are dealing with, they have taken another step in preparation.

Training in the democratic group method is an important part of preparing the members. If the group is meeting for the first time, or unacquainted with the democratic way, it would be helpful to spend the first session or several sessions on education in democratic process. Books

⁸Ibid., p. 15.

⁹Ibid., pp. 13-16.

such as Robert Powell's should be reviewed and studied. If the group has been using the democratic process, it is beneficial to review the evaluation of the last session to quickly refresh the members as to how the method worked when last used.

In preparing the group, the leader, if already selected, should help to establish and maintain rapport among the members. He should sense emotional problems being brought to the group, helping members to release emotional conflicts carried over from other situations. Sometimes a brief fellowship period before the meeting may provide time for ventilation of emotional feelings carried over from another situation and for establishing rapport through general conversation.

III. FORMULATION OF GROUP GOALS

Kelley and Thibaut feel that a "collection of individuals...becomes a group as the members accept a common task, become interdependent in its performance, and interact with one another to promote its accomplishments."¹⁰ Until the group defines its goals, the members may have diverse opinions as to why the group exists. Gordon Lippitt urges that "it is important at the beginning of any group's life that it reach a clear understanding of the goals it

¹⁰Gulley, op. cit., p. 64.

wants to reach."¹¹ In the decision-making group, the members should realize that their role is not just to discuss general situations, but to deal with specific issues and to recommend or decide on appropriate action. When this goal is not understood or accepted, some members may try to shift the decision to another group or abstain from personal involvement in deciding the issue.

A responsible leader or member can help the group to decide on an objective, by at least "simply encouraging the group deliberately to choose a goal."¹² Raymond Rigdon reminds us that even if a group does not choose a goal, one may still exist unconsciously in the minds of the members.¹³ Some members who attend merely out of a sense of duty, may remain silent partners in the decision-making, which destroys the democratic process. One who is responsible, on the other hand, can through his enthusiasm inspire the group to rise to a high level of interest in the decisions it will make. Dull board meetings can be enlivened by one member stimulating the group to see the opportunities and influence they carry. Especially is this true in the area

¹¹Leland Powers Bradford, Group Development. (Washington: National Training Laboratories -- National Education Association, 1961), p. 35.

¹²Raymond Rigdon, "Responsible Participation." International Journal of Religious Education. XLII:3 (November 1965), 9.

¹³Ibid.

of applying social ethics. Here is an area that can stir a group to its roots, getting it involved in real life situations. Board meetings will no longer be dull if the decisions revolve around the church's mission in our social situation.

The group's goal should be the product of interaction and not imposed from the outside. To a certain extent this is a difficulty in groups that are chosen or elected and have their duties defined by the constitution. Some of the goals have already been spelled out though the members were probably aware of this before accepting the positions. However, even written pre-decided goals need to be discussed and interpreted by the members.

Specific goals may arise with each problem or situation with which the group wrestles. "A group goal cannot emerge until the members of the group share enough of their thinking about their hopes and dreams and interests in the project at hand."¹⁴ In this sharing process the problem is seen in a new light by other members.

In choosing a goal, we must be aware that each member comes to the group with a number of purposes. Some are known and shared; others are private and kept secret; some are below the conscious level. An effective group

¹⁴Powell, op. cit., p. 44.

member has the ability to sense when a private purpose is out of order and is willing to remove it from circulation until it is appropriate.¹⁵ Members of the group should be constantly alert to their own personal goals and to the private goals of others.

Goals should not be treated as if they are static. As the group moves ahead, the goals need to be restated and reworked if necessary. The four reasons which Powell believes necessitates this review are: 1. to assure that all members understand the goal, especially if it is abstract, 2. to keep participants abreast of other members as the situation develops, 3. to close the gap between verbalized purposes and those dynamic purposes below the surface, and 4. to re-evaluate the group's purpose and thereby grow.¹⁶

As the group works through what its goal should be, it should keep in mind that statement of ultimate purpose which has been worked out by Christian educators:

to help individuals become aware of God's seeking love as shown especially in Jesus Christ and to help them respond in faith and love in order that they may: (1) find self-fulfillment under God; (2) identify themselves as sons of God and members of the Christian community; (3) live as Christians in all relations in human society, and (4) abide in the Christian hope.¹⁷

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 49, 50.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 51, 52.

This purpose is large enough to include goals of decision-making groups for it expresses the theological basis of decisions in the church. It is the underlying assumption on which Christian democratic groups must build.

Regardless of what goal the group arrives at, it should be person-centered. Some writers on the subject of making decisions in the church emphasize the fact that better procedures will increase the productivity of people. This motivation does not seem to be the basic consideration either from Christian or democratic standpoints; yet, to be sure, creative productivity contributes to personal growth. The primary interest should be what happens to the people involved rather than productivity being the end. The goals of all church groups, including decision-making, should begin and end with persons. As Robert Edgar found in his group work in the church, the whole meaning of the group experience is to become real persons "as we have this opportunity to share in the 'I-thou' relationship in honesty and openness."¹⁸ The proper goals and group procedures are a necessary part then of the church being the church, for an "essential relationship exists between group experiences and the nature and purpose of the church."¹⁹

¹⁸Bruce Larson (ed.), Groups that Work. (New York: Faith at Work, 1964), p. 30.

¹⁹Powell, op. cit., p. 9.

As we study the problems which churches face in arriving at and applying social ethics, confusion of goals may be the underlying difficulty. To talk about the church's mission is one thing; to act to carry out the mission is another. When the group decides on a program of action, then it becomes aware that under the surface are diversified goals that have never been resolved. Before any decisions about the church's action can be made, it appears imperative that some common understanding and acceptance of the church's central task needs to be arrived at.

IV. ARRIVING AT GROUP NORMS

From the moment that interaction begins in a new group, a pattern of behavior is being established. This pattern is called the norm of the group. Most of the actions in the group are motivated and guided by those norms which come into being to serve as a basis for the group to function.²⁰ Rather than stop at every turn to decide the next step, the group adopts habitual ways of acting which reduce the number of individual decisions for the members. Yet as these norms are established, the group may feel stifled or overcontrolled by them. When the group meets

²⁰L. Thomas Hopkins, Interaction: The Democratic Process. (Boston: Heath, 1941), p. 12.

for the first time there is a considerable "clanking and grinding of gears" as the members figure out and establish a satisfactory pattern of relationships.²¹ Once the guideposts for the groups actions are established, there is a psychological relaxation, for people feel more secure when they know "what is expected of them." The decision-making group may adopt one of five types of procedural norms or patterns described by Deal C. Barnlund and Franklyn S.

Haiman: 1. They may be overly cooperative, thereby suppressing conflict. 2. They may be overly competitive where the emphasis is mostly on conflict. 3. They may be an anarchic group where "rugged individualism runs amuck," so that few interpersonal relations exist. 4. The norms may be built around ritual, such as Robert's Rules of Order, so that all decisions follow a formal set pattern with little chance for expression of emotion. 5. The pattern may be interdependent in which case discussions tend to be direct and free, where "differences are frankly expressed and vigorously argued."²² This final pattern is the one espoused in this dissertation.

The norm acts as a standard with which each member of the group complies to some degree. As the group inter-

²¹Deal C. Barnlund and Franklyn S. Haiman, The Dynamics of Discussion. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1960), p. 190.

²²Ibid., pp. 196, 197.

acts more frequently, the norms become more visible and so are easier to conform to. As the norms are adopted they are more likely to be positively evaluated and participants are more likely to identify with them. Paul Miller reports experiments showing that persons who spoke out privately on an issue, shaded their remarks to fit the group norm when they gave their opinion in public.²³

One of the problems in a democratic setting is seen by psychiatrists who have speculated that the greatest influence on the group in its early stages comes from neurotic members who force the group into patterns of repression, competition or ritualism. On the basis of present knowledge, those who are most likely to influence the group norms are those who have authority, those who get more attention at first, and those who have disturbed personalities.²⁴ This being true, it is very important that a decision-making group be careful not to build a rigid framework which later stifles the group. In the area of social action, some church groups are so built around "success" norms that they never break loose to build norms that pertain to the out-going mission of the church. The original norms when the church is struggling to begin, are self-centered

²³Paul M. Miller, Group Dynamics in Evangelism. (Scottsdale, Penna.: Herald Press, 1961), p. 96.

²⁴Barnlund, op. cit., pp. 199, 200.

in order for the group to survive. Later, these norms may be difficult to change, especially to change to ones that are controversial. It may be that this reason prompts some church renewal leaders to suggest the dissolving of present decision-making groups in the church rather than reform them because strong traditions and precedents have immobilized the group against change. The freedom which the democratic process offers poses the danger of permitting wrong patterns to be established. When the group adopts firm decision-making patterns, anyone who breaks or veers from the established mood feels the social pressure to return to the existing pattern. It is difficult to maintain the type of open democratic thinking which permits individuals to stand apart as a minority of one.

Group norms are changed when sufficient dissatisfaction begins to grow in the group so that old patterns no longer satisfy, when new members enter the group and cause a shift in the balance of power, when the present group structure is threatened by internal strife, or when the group encourages feedback in order to examine its own interpersonal relations.²⁵ Decision-making groups may, therefore, change their norms as the above situations arise. Hopefully, the groups that make decisions in

²⁵Ibid., pp. 203-205,

churches will see the value of remaining democratically oriented and will resist the forces that would move them into the autocratic or laissez-faire patterns. The continuing norms found in the democratic type group emphasize openness, acceptance and freedom as described in the chapter on the democratic theory.

V. FORMULATION OF AN AGENDA

Even in the democratically operated group an agenda should be drawn up. Despite the fact that the particular topic to be dealt with may have been previously determined, the group should have a chance to discuss the way it wants to outline and plan what it will consider in the overall topic.²⁶ This agenda can help by (1) permitting the group to sub-divide the problem into smaller portions for more thorough study; (2) preventing the intrusion of irrelevant matters which would lead the group on a tangent; and by (3) increasing the coherency of the group's communication as each member tries to relate his remarks to other's ideas.²⁷ Whether a group chooses to operate by a loose or strict agenda will depend upon the group size, time available, nature of the problem, purposes of the group,

²⁶William G. Hollister, Group Participation Methods. (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1950), p. 7.

²⁷Barnlund, op. cit., p. 96.

interpersonal attitudes of the group members and personal desires for order. In the democratic environment, the agenda maintains flexibility in operation and in every case will be a consensus carefully evolved by the group.

Another significant impediment to the group process is the hidden agenda. When a group meets to work through a problem, some of the participants may come with answers already in their hip-pockets. The meeting may then consist in conflict between the hidden agendas and the plan which the group tries to work out. The way to deal with the hidden agenda is to watch for its arrival in the discussion. Then the reasons behind the concealed agendas, that is, the needs of the concealers, may be discussed as a part of the searching of the group.²⁸

In arriving at the agenda, the group will need to carefully analyze the problem, defining the significant differences which need to be studied, as well as exploring the present beliefs of the group about the problem.²⁹

VI. DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Effective problem-solving or decision-making by a group requires an understanding of a systematic series of

²⁸Bradford, op. cit., p. 60ff.

²⁹Utterback, op. cit., p. 403.

steps which is followed by a group in arriving at a decision.

The first of these steps is to locate the problem, concern or question that needs to be resolved. Usually in a church organization the larger board or governing body has the job of locating general congregational problems. More specialized groups may originate proposals in specific areas. In either case, once they feel the problem is pinpointed, the originating group may refer the topic to a sub-group or committee to diagnose, study and return with a proposal for action. However, the sub-group may find that when it meets, it is necessary to review the decision of the larger body as to the location of the problem. In the area of social ethics, the confusion over location of the problem is very important. In trying to apply beliefs to action, people see the problem from different angles due to private interests and personal prejudices.

When the problem is properly located, then definition may begin. Arthur Hollingshead finds that "a clear concise statement of the problem is essential to straightforward thinking."³⁰ By stating the problem carefully, members focus thinking upon a definite situation and thereby direct the discussion. Time must be taken for a de-

³⁰Arthur D. Hollingshead, Guidance in Democratic Living. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1941), p. 158.

scription of the situation as it appears to the various members of the group.³¹ No two persons respond in the same way to a problem situation because, as Gestalt psychology points out, that to which a person responds is seldom a simple stimulus.³² John Dewey reminds us that the "vague feelings people have about a situation have to be objectified and made conscious."³³ Part of this clarification may be in the defining of terms, especially when the group is from divergent backgrounds and experiences. The problem must in some way relate to the experience of the members, either by being connected to some part of their environment where an obstacle blocks the way to future experiencing in the area of the members' interests, or by challenging the group to some new situation in their environment.

As interaction takes place during the defining period, each member becomes aware of the problem, not only as it appears to him, but also as other members of the group see it.

Harrison Elliott recommends that in order to clarify the situation and preserve the democratic spirit in the opening segments of the group's interaction, members should

³¹Harrison Sacket Elliott, The Process of Group Thinking, (New York: Association Press, 1946), p. 42.

³²Ibid., p. 43.

³³Barnlund, op. cit., p. 87.

be invited to give descriptions of various known situations where the problem is immediate but to keep all such descriptions in the third person, free from the personal commitment of the person giving them.³⁴

Lambert Case suggests that in diagnosing the problem, members objectify it by writing it on a blackboard or a piece of paper. By writing it out they crystallize the problem and focus attention upon it.³⁵ This avoids the intensifying of the problem through anxiety, worry or pessimism.

VII. GATHERING AND EVALUATING DATA

Before the group can approach any decision, it must pull together all available relevant factual statements or authoritative opinions concerning the historical background or the problem's symptoms, in much the same way that a physician might examine a patient. As the issue is explored, some of the ideas or facts presented will supplement one another and can form a pattern while others will be in definite contradiction. During this gathering period, members of the group should avoid taking sides or jumping to early conclusions. When a group member makes a contribution to the facts, he should indicate: (1) "why he con-

³⁴Elliott, op. cit., p. 45.

³⁵Case, op. cit., p. 44.

siders the factors he mentions important"; (2) "why he thinks this a question of concern"; (3) "why he believes the issue he states is the important issue"; or (4) "why he believes these are the reasons for the difficulty."³⁶

In order to make the ingathering as complete as possible, each participant should be encouraged to be free and uninhibited in providing information. The leader should attempt to draw into the discussion the silent members while at the same time restraining any who would monopolize the information-seeking period. In some situations the group may need a recess to give members time to seek out additional facts through research, reading or survey. The group may wish to plan an experimental project to bring in new data.³⁷ In the area of social action, the group may need to lean heavily on the experiences of others since the church member has limited experience here.

One of the criticisms already mentioned about the democratic process is that it is a pooling of ignorance. This may be guarded against by taking time to gain an adequate supply of facts. At the same time, the participants must realize that regardless of how much information they may collect, they rarely, if ever, have all the facts or

³⁶Elliott, op. cit., p. 46.

³⁷D. M. Hall, Dynamics of Group Action. (Danville, Ill.: Interstate, 1964), p. 113.

even understand completely those facts they do have.

Information gathered can be divided into two categories: (1) that which is subjective and derived from a person's own understanding of the situation (William James calls this "knowledge of acquaintance."); and (2) that which comes through the reports of others.³⁸ In the democratic process the group members, using the facts from their own experiences, sift and weigh this material, to arrive at a more balanced view.

When group members work with their own subjective interpretation of the facts, they sometimes show unwarranted hostility if their ideas are criticized or questioned. However, members should be prepared for the exercise of the obligation other members have to test the accuracy and completeness of the facts on which the assertions rest. Walter Lippman was concerned about the difficulty of getting accurate information upon which to base decisions. He raised the question as to how we can get inside our minds a picture that corresponds to the rapidly changing environment in which we live. "If we cannot, then modern man, and democracy certainly, are obsolete."³⁹ Because of the immense quantity of ideas, experiences and complexities available today, it is impossible to be well enough informed

³⁸Barnlund, op. cit., p. 104.

³⁹Ibid., p. 101.

to settle all questions by a personal storehouse of wisdom. This is especially true in the area of social ethics and action. While church members judge social situations from their own experience or perception, controversy arises from each member trying to offer solutions limited to his segmented perception.

In dealing with second hand information, the problems are intensified. Sometimes the information has passed through six or eight hands before reaching the group and the context of the information may be lost. Outside sources of information may include consultants or specialists brought in, audio-visual resources, field trips or outside reading. When the expert comes to a group using the democratic process, he should make the facts and his interpretations available in such a way that the group can decide what to do, rather than trying to make the decision for them. In highly technical realms, as social ethics can be, the democratic process involves also the choice of an expert they wish to hear. Under such circumstances, even when speeches are used, Bruno Lasker does not think these interfere with the democratic process.⁴⁰

Checking out information through research is usually a slow and painstaking procedure, but is absolutely necessary if the group is not to make a decision in ignorance.

⁴⁰Bruno Lasker, Democracy Through Discussion. (New York: Wilson, 1949), p. 84.

Especially is this true in a democratic setting where all ideas should receive a fair and impartial hearing.

Statements are usually those of fact or inference. Facts are expressed through personal interpretation of happenings allowing room for a variety of interpretations. If several group members have shared the same happening, it is usually possible to arrive at a more accurate presentation of the facts. Inferential statements, however, include conclusions, predictions, judgments and interpretations. They usually reflect more of the prejudices or habits of thought of the speaker. Inferences are not as dependent upon the perception as they are upon the intelligence, education and experience of the one who makes them. This is not to say that factual observation is always more dependable than inference.⁴¹ Both are essential to decision.

VIII. CHOOSING THE METHOD OF INTERACTION

Because the democratic way allows the group to choose which method will be used to make the decision, the participants should all be aware of the possible methods available. Once the facts have been gathered, the method of considering them must be agreed upon. D. M. Hall lists

⁴¹Barnlund, op. cit., pp. 109-112.

fifteen devices for helping the group to arrive at a decision.⁴² The main ones in most frequent usage are presented here.

Lecture. While we do not ordinarily think of the lecture approach as fitting in with the democratic method, it should not be overlooked as a means of gathering information and opinions about a subject it is difficult to investigate. Even though a monologue, mental interaction is taking place in the minds of the listeners. Especially when the decision must be made in haste or in time of emergency, this method should not be overlooked but should have group approval.

Discussion. In the democratic process, the discussion method of interaction is most frequently used. Lambert Case lists six types of discussion groups: (1) spontaneous groups for short duration interaction, (2) discussions planned to give information and allow opportunity for sharing, (3) round-table discussions to hear a subject discussed and allow participation, (4) brainstorming to stimulate creative thinking, (5) panel discussions to present a variety of views, (6) the forum, usually a lecture with question period following.⁴³ In the decision-making process

⁴²Hall, op. cit., p. 188ff.

⁴³Case, op. cit., pp. 32,33.

in small groups, the second and fourth are most frequently used.

One of the advantages of the discussion method is that all participants in the group get involved. Kurt Lewin found that attitudes are more apt to be changed in an intense and more permanent way when the individual is involved in the development of plans.⁴⁴ In terms of church renewal and social action, Elton Trueblood reminds us, "If the church is to be renewed, there must be a new dimension of inter-action and involvement on the part of the average laymen."⁴⁵ Powell discovered that "when people are involved in the development of plans, they are more willing and ready to give time and effort to seeing the plans carried through."⁴⁶ He points out a distinction between participation and involvement. A person may attend and take part in making a decision without really caring what the final decision is. That is, he may be intellectually involved without being emotionally involved. Honest interaction, believes Howard Keeley, is necessary for church renewal.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Louis M. Smith and Bruce B. Hudgins, Educational Psychology: An Application of Social and Behavioral Theory. (New York: Knopf, 1964), p. 485.

⁴⁵Larson, op. cit., p. 50.

⁴⁶Powell, op. cit., p. 20.

⁴⁷Larson, op. cit., p. 50.

One of the key issues in the social action controversy is whether or not the church should be involved in social issues. Those who argue for social involvement use, among other arguments, the logic which has just been presented. Such discussion procedures also insure that any church pronouncement will have the backing of a larger body of members.

A successful technique for starting or stimulating discussion is that of raising questions. Raymond M. Rigdon finds that a tactful and skillful question by the leader or a member will usually stimulate others to begin relating their own personal feelings or experiences regarding the problem.⁴⁸ This Socratic method can help the members to move toward more consistency of beliefs according to a study referred to by Smith and Hudgins.⁴⁹

Another aspect of the discussion approach is the need for the participants to know how to listen creatively. Good listening means that one gives the speaker full attention and is not thinking about how he will answer the speaker at the next break in discussion. The listener needs to understand both the words and the spirit of what the speaker said. Sometimes we must look behind the words

⁴⁸Rigdon, op. cit., p. 9.

⁴⁹Smith, op. cit., pp. 481, 482.

to discover the ideas that the speaker is trying to communicate. If the motive of the speaker is not known and understood, the group will have a more difficult time making a decision. Robert Edgar refers us to Douglas Steere's book Listening to Another to learn how to listen. Edgar states, "One of the ways we can fully love a person is to listen with concern, with feeling, with understanding, and with acceptance."⁵⁰

Brainstorming. One of the techniques for diagnosing the problem, collecting facts or bringing forth creative new ideas is called brainstorming.⁵¹ Brainstorming is the method of gathering as many ideas on one topic or problem without stopping to evaluate them. In this way, the fullest potential of the group is concentrated on the problem without any member being inhibited in expression. This method is usually used in conjunction with other techniques of interaction. It helps the group to overcome inhibitions which might keep members from contributing all that they might. Usually persons evaluate what they are going to say before they say it. If a person thinks the idea is different or that he might have to defend it, often he will keep it to himself. By having a free atmosphere with each

⁵⁰Larson, op. cit., p. 29.

⁵¹Powell, op. cit., p. 119.

member offering what comes to his mind regarding a certain problem or decision, good ideas come forth and cross-breeding of ideas increases their value. While businesses have made great use of this method, churches rely on traditional methods, thereby losing much creativity.

By brainstorming in decision-making groups, we can capture the abilities of the visionaries and the inventors of church groups. They do not need to be shunted off to the theoretical areas but their creativeness can open new perspectives on all choices before the church.

This process of "imagineering" has a logical progression to it even though it remains flexible. Once a problem is defined, it serves as stimulation for thought. With this goal in mind, the group proceeds to gather all facts. All ideas contributed are written down, regardless of how fantastic they sound. No evaluation is permitted. When the search for ideas ends, they are organized into various categories, eliminating duplicates. Then the members, perhaps breaking into smaller groups, try to think of alternatives to each idea by adding, subtracting, reversing, speeding up, slowing down, or contrasting the solutions offered. Eventually the original list will be doubled or tripled. Then the group enters a simmering period where the ideas are turned over in the members' minds. Finally, a period of synthesis or analysis is

reached. Here, reason, judgment and experience enter. This is followed by a period of testing the solution to see which are the best.⁵²

Role-playing. Another successful technique associated with the discussion process is role-playing, a "spontaneous dramatization of a human relations situation."⁵³ The participants who are making the decision can feel what it is like to be in the role of those who will be affected by the decision. D. M. Hall gives detailed suggestions for using the role-playing method.⁵⁴ This is one of the best ways of helping the members to experience the feelings of others instead of just hearing about them. In controversial areas like social ethics, members can act out the roles of those who feel differently or even the situations of those who will benefit from social action involvement. Since controversy is usually on the feeling level, this technique is a good one to use in resolving disharmony.

Buzz groups. One technique for getting a discussion to involve everyone is by dividing the group into buzz sessions. While the method has been widely used, and

⁵²Case, op. cit., pp. 39-41.

⁵³Powell, op. cit., p. 121.

⁵⁴Hall, op. cit., pp. 184, 185.

sometimes misused, it has not found wide application in decision-making groups. In this technique, the decision-making body is divided into sub-groups of about six persons. Because most persons find it easier to express their ideas in smaller groups, this concept encourages sharing. When the ideas have found approval by two or three others, participants are more inclined to present them to the larger group. William Hollister uses the buzz group as a tool, (1) to get 100% group participation, (2) to change the pace, and (3) to cut short a situation where a few are dominating the discussion.⁵⁵

To use buzz groups, the leader should give the sections a definite assignment, often in the form of a question. After about five minutes, the buzz groups report the results of the conversation to the larger group. Rather than a complete report, it may be better to give each group a chance to submit one idea before any submit a second. When used properly, these sub-groups encourage wider participation and bring forth creative thought which might have remained unexpressed.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Hollister, op. cit., p. 14.

⁵⁶Powell, op. cit., pp. 124, 125.

IX. MODIFYING RULES OF ORDER

Because many decision-making groups in the church, even small committees, may feel bound to the traditional Robert's Rules of Order, Powell suggests that in a small group these "often interfere with creative thinking and full participation."⁵⁷ By modifications in the usual rules, a group may gain the advantage of rules of order in precise wording of consensus and in full participation in voting, and at the same time avoid the dangers in formal procedures. Recent experiments commend the practice of making the motion after discussion has taken place, rather than before. This places the emphasis on discussing the problem instead of the solution (the motion).

Another suggested change relates to the leader. Rather than the formal leader of the Robert's system who serves as traffic director and referee, in the small face-to-face groups, the members should speak to each other instead of the chairman. This means the leader can be a participant during most of the discussion. When necessary, he can return to his formal role.

X. ENCOURAGING INTERACTION

We turn our attention now to what is happening inside the group while the decision-making is in process.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 125.

In the democratic process, we can measure some of its success by the amount of interaction which takes place in the group. When participation is less than normal, the cause may be one of these five reasons given by Leland Bradford:

- A. The goal seems unimportant.
- B. There is fear in working or fear of the solution.
- C. The group lacks skill in solving problems.
- D. The members feel their work will be useless.
- E. The group is involved in conflict.⁵⁸

The leader should check to see how participation can be increased. As interaction is encouraged, attitudes begin to change. This change is important to help the group reach consensus.

Attitude change. Part of the change that interaction brings is shifting of attitudes of the members.

Attitudes, consciously or unconsciously, control many of the decisions which the group makes. An attitude is defined as "an emotionalized tendency organized through experience, to react positively or negatively toward a psychological object."⁵⁹ Among the participants may be poor attitudes or good attitudes. The former tend to weaken the constructive interaction that could take place.

Poor attitudes. Poor attitudes include prejudice, which is often fixed in people at a young age. G. H. Green

⁵⁸Hall, op. cit., p. 177.

⁵⁹Smith, op. cit., p. 464.

found in one survey that many institutions and communication media are responsible for prejudice. Books were responsible for 50% of attitudes while the church accounted for 1%.⁶⁰ In the area of social ethics and involvement in social problems, prejudice is one of the hurdles that must be overcome if the church is to move ahead in its mission. Strong emotional prejudices seek to preserve the status quo in present day churches.

Apathy is another weak attitude which can be carried over from groups where the authoritarian process has been used. As the group size increases, or participation is discouraged, apathy increases. Techniques need to be used to stimulate members to overcome apathy. Once the individual can be shown how much his contribution is needed to make the decision democratic, apathy should disappear. Democracy is not found in just giving a man a vote in making decisions, but in giving him also a "significant and active part in creating common purposes and programs."⁶¹ When our committees and boards respond to the challenge of Kingdom building, apathy in decision-making will cease.

⁶⁰Arthur Lichenstein, Can Attitudes Be Taught? (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1934), p. 4.

⁶¹Barnlund, op. cit., p. 368.

The attitude of cliquishness, says Powell, is also an impeding factor in democratic decision-making.⁶² Those who establish mutual bonds slowly in the group tend to pair off and lean on each other for support. Sometimes they create tight little groups and act as a block. When one expresses an opinion, the others support him for emotional reasons. The way to destroy this attitude of separation is not by destroying the bonds that bind the clique together but by adding additional bonds. Approach the members of the clique one by one to build other relationships with them which will support them so that they can act independently. In controversial issues, there is great tendency to cliquishness.

Good attitudes. There are numerous good attitudes that are helpful in the democratic process in a small group. Perhaps one of the greatest significance is acceptance. Robert A. Edgar finds that open listening in the group paves the way for acceptance of others in the group. "To communicate one's full awareness of the relevant experience is a risk in interpersonal relationships."⁶³ When a member experiences genuine concern for his being as a person from

⁶²Powell, op. cit., pp. 38, 39.

⁶³C. Gratton Kemp, Perspectives on the Group Process. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), p. 39.

other group members, "he realizes he can trust his goodness and his badness to members of the group."⁶⁴ By accepting and being accepted, the masks drop away and a person discovers who he really is. He then knows what it is to have integrity and authenticity. The member's participation in decision-making then loses any selfish motivation and he begins to think of the welfare of the group. Decision-making is no longer a power struggle but a cooperative venture for the welfare of the whole. The attitude of love must not be left out of the business life of the church, as it sometimes is. As group members practice the art of loving others, and at the same time experience being loved, they become responsive to the highest loyalties of the Christian faith.

The democratic group also develops that sense of belonging which is so vital in relationships. "It appears that when...people meet together one of the first concerns of each, conscious or unconscious, is to establish a relationship that will give him a sense of belonging and acceptance."⁶⁵ The initial bond between two persons serves to give each a sense of belonging but may also shut others out.

⁶⁴Robert A. Edgar, "Groups Organized for Listening." International Journal of Religious Education, XLII:3 (November, 1965), 46.

⁶⁵Powell, op. cit., p. 37.

The struggle to establish these security-giving bonds and to protect existing bonds is seldom seen by group members, but those in research claim that it is the cause of much of the sub-surface dynamics that cause person's reactions in small groups.

How can the democratic process change attitudes?

Attitudes are changed by persons responding to stimuli which are changes in the environment, external or internal, which affect them.⁶⁶ These changes set up a dissonance which can be tolerated until it reaches a certain level. Then the person must adapt. As long as the person can maintain a balance of satisfaction, no change is needed.⁶⁷ Some persons are successful in keeping contradictory attitudes but both are usually not expressed in overt behavior.

The democratic process introduces a diversity of stimuli from the varied participants so that dissonance is set in motion. When the dissonance is no longer tolerable, the individual shifts his attitude to a more comfortable position. Also, this process encourages the freedom that permits an individual to change attitudes without judgment or criticism. New bonds established with persons

⁶⁶Bernard C. Hennessy, Public Opinion. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1965), p. 321.

⁶⁷George W. Hartmann, Educational Psychology. (New York: American, 1941), p. 399.

of different attitudes makes it easier to change.

As members of the group interact, attitudes are changed by shifts in the group norm. The group first works to unfreeze the existing norms and then establish a new set, which are then frozen.⁶⁸ Attitudes in the group must shift to be congruent with the new norms. In general, members change their attitudes to respond to what they believe to be the group norms.⁶⁹ This assumes that members do not have minds closed to change. As decisions are made, the group's norms may change to conform to the thinking behind their decisions.

Thorndike summarized this approach by advocating four principles or methods of changing attitudes: (1) Try to get the person to imitate the behavior of the group and so acquire their emotional attitude. (2) Through association, acquire an attitude from those with whom one agrees. (3) Through formation of conditioned reflexes condition the same response from association with other attitudes. (4) By repetition of the stimulus, weaken the indifference to the situation.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Kurt Lewin, "Frontiers to Group Dynamics." Journal of Social Issues, I, (1948), 5.

⁶⁹Hennessey, op. cit., p. 260.

⁷⁰Edward L. Thorndike, The Psychology of Wants, Interests, and Attitudes, (New York: Appleton-Century, 1935), p. 157.

Mutual bond building: The process of interaction is built around the idea of building personal relationships within the group. Powell has referred to this process as building mutual bonds. With the proper attitudes these bonds can be increased. To find the potential number of response bonds in a group, he has worked out a mathematical formula which reads like this:

The number of persons in a group multiplied by the same number, minus the same number and divided by two, equals the potential number of mutual response bonds.⁷¹

$$\frac{N^2 - N}{2} \text{ equals } B.$$

The larger the group is, the more difficult it is to get all the potential bonds in operation. At the same time, it is vital to morale and efficiency that the majority of the response bonds be established and functioning. When the bonds are not developed, rapport declines and communication is blocked. For this reason, small groups become more valuable as the place where one is more likely to have more bonds functioning.

Communication: Another of the difficulties group members have in interaction is in making themselves understood to each other. Language, which people depend upon so much in interaction, proves to be an inadequate tool

⁷¹Powell, op. cit., p. 34.

at times to communicate ideas and feelings. Words mean different things to different people. Besides, words carry emotional overtones and connotations. It will be worthwhile for members of groups to seek for understanding of the nature and causes of semantic difficulties.⁷² But problems in communication arise not only in the verbal but also in the non-verbal areas. A nod, a smile, a frown all speak and thus establish bonds. The ability to express feeling and to recognize feeling in others is an important skill in communication. It is wrong to think of decisions as being purely intellectual and to forget the influence of feeling and emotion.

One of the problems in communication is the person who expresses no emotion, who is never hostile. Just as serious is the problem of the person who is always hostile. The overly antagonistic person takes every disagreement personally so that it is difficult to have a normal discussion. The opposite type of person lives in an atmosphere of "sweetness and light" because he is afraid of conflict. When they suppress their own negative feelings to keep "peace at any price", those persons destroy the democratic process which calls for honesty and openness of feeling.⁷³

⁷²Franklyn S. Haiman, Group Leadership and Democratic Action. (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 93.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 93-95.

In order to help the communication process one can use feedback. While sometimes feedback is left to the evaluation phase of group life, since it is going on in individuals all the time in the group, it can be used as a tool during the interaction as well. As the members listen to what is being said and what is being felt, they will hear reactions being expressed. The individuals will learn to react to these signals which the other group members feed back to them. At times during the discussion, the leader may ask members of the group to relate feedback signals they are receiving. Once the decisions are made and put into action, the group may also profit from feedback it gets from those affected by the decision. When controversy begins to arise there will be subtle feedback signals long before the issue comes into the open. An astute leader or pastor will listen for these overtones in expression or moods.

In communication, ventilation of feelings should take place. Certain topics brought up for action will arouse emotional feelings, after which time the one who ventilates may be able to express his opinion on a more intellectual level. When the group learns not to fear the ventilation, it can be handled in a positive way by the group or leader. The leader can help by keeping the ventilation away from personalities and other harmful areas.

The rigid formality of many church decision-making groups often discourages ventilation before the group. When the group suppresses it, ventilation will then take place in sub-groups in outer corridors.

Dangers of techniques. The leader and the group members should all be on guard that these methods are not abused. Some participants may want to turn to "buzz groups" whenever some of their ideas meet resistance. Others may want to "brainstorm" on minor issues which do not warrant the expense of time. When techniques are misused, the group often builds up a resistance to their future use. When misuse is evident, the group should use its power to jointly determine what techniques will be used.

Especially when matters of an emergency nature arise, group procedures may be too time-consuming. When important decisions are urgent, the group may have to rely on limited facts, expert opinion and the present maturity of the group members. However, when too many "emergencies" arise, the group may check to see if this is an attempt to circumvent democratic process.

XI. ARRIVING AT THE DECISION

While some non-decision-making groups may end their discussion without anything resolved, the type of group presented here is expected to arrive at an answer for the

problem or concern. Some in the group may push for an early decision; others may try to avoid making the decision, especially if the subject is controversial. But most are aware that some action is called for, even if it means recommending no action.

1. How will such a decision be decided upon?

It is assumed that through the discussion or interaction, some solutions have been presented and discussed. The possible synthesis of several solutions may be simmering in some minds. The chairman can assist, says Harrison Elliott, by pointing out the question to be solved so that it will be evident that the group needs to find a specific answer to a specific situation under consideration.⁷⁴ In keeping with the democratic principles, all possible solutions must be considered even though they may seem to some as unimportant. The wider the group's range of selection, the more chance the group will have for the wisest choice.⁷⁵ By seeking the largest number of choices, the group uses all the available resources, encourages those who might hesitate to participate if their solution were ignored and takes into consideration that the best choice might include parts of several suggestions.⁷⁶

⁷⁴Elliott, op. cit., p. 47.

⁷⁵Barnlund, op. cit., p. 88.

⁷⁶Elliott, op. cit., p. 48.

Of course, while desiring to consider all possible solutions, the members must be willing to eliminate those which are inadequate. By clinging too firmly to past solutions, the members may be perpetuating the state of savagery, as James Robinson calls it, in which man has lived during almost all his earthly existence and which he still "perpetuates in all sorts of primitive barbarism in modern society."⁷⁷

Once we have all possible solutions gathered, William Utterback suggests dividing them into three categories. Where solutions are easily understood, no further discussion is required. If some solutions need further information or investigation, then these are set aside for study. Where there is misunderstanding or disagreement about proposed solutions, the points should be taken up and thoroughly discussed.⁷⁸

When the group has reviewed the solutions and finally has a motion or proposal for action, they must decide what method shall be used to choose one solution. Democratically oriented groups must face the fact that there are several methods of finalizing the decision. Whichever method is chosen, there should be an opportunity for each person to

⁷⁷Barnlund, op. cit., p. 89.

⁷⁸Utterback, op. cit., p. 47.

to indicate his position and have equal power in the choice. Methods usually considered, include voting, consensus and referral.

Voting. At times the group may choose to vote on the final solution. This can be done either by straw vote which is stated by the chairman or an actual counted vote by voice, show-of-hands or standing. The straw vote will more likely be taken along the way of discussion to size up the group's feelings, a form of feedback from the group. The formal vote usually follows a motion by a member of the group. In the less formal setting, it has been suggested that the motion follow the discussion which then finds the group ready to vote. When the final vote shows all members acting in favor of the proposed solution or motion, the action is said to be unanimous. This does not mean that all are 100% for the solution but that all agree this is the best choice.

Voting does have its limitations. When the group realizes that the solution will be arrived at in this way, polarization takes place, each side trying to get a majority of votes. Positions are solidified and may be more difficult to change later. Voting also has the disadvantage of each member showing his position, unless by secret ballot, so that the members of the minority are identified. When the chairman calls for a "division of the house" by

vote, the group may truly become divided with deepening emotional chasms. For these reasons, while voting is often used, it may make further unity of the group difficult.

Consensus. In a small group where formality of the vote is artificial, or division imminent, the leader may state or ask a member to state what he feels is the consensus. "Groups characterized by dynamic interaction, open communication and mutual respect find voting (except in minor matters) less satisfying as a decision-making method than consensus because of the limitations of voting."⁷⁹ In this way the group seeks to agree on a common plan, which includes the "valid insights and values of all parties."⁸⁰ The recorder who has been keeping track of the various ideas presented may be asked to state the consensus as he sees it. In the "block-and-gap" method, areas of agreement are drawn together, separated by smaller areas of disagreement. Gradually, out of the early blocks of agreement, a later consensus grows.⁸¹

But consensus also has its dangers. The apparent harmony achieved by a consensus may be artificial. Harrison

⁷⁹Jane Warters, Group Guidance. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), p. 80.

⁸⁰Edward C. Glanz, Groups in Guidance. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1962), p. 135.

⁸¹Ibid.

Elliott warns that when a group settles for a consensus, differences are suppressed and may break out at a later time. Those who disagree may be afraid to spoil what appears to be peace and harmony. An individual may be more desirous of having the group approval than to risk appearing as a "crank". This may then be a limitation on the democratic process in which communication should be free and creative.⁸² To offset this danger, several might be asked to state the consensus after which it could be discussed. A consensus of consensuses may be arrived at. A few minor changes might prevent later hostility and also help all members to be enthusiastic about the decision.

Delegate. The third method is the possibility of the group delegating the actual making of the decision to a small selected committee or individual who has listened to all points of view. When "good" decisions are made by these people, the group readily accepts them. The danger of this method is that one individual may not fairly represent the majority of the group's feelings.

2. How may varying opinions be related to the decision?

Since there are many opinions in the group, each member is concerned to have his opinion represented in the

⁸²Warters, op. cit., p. 80.

decision. Is this possible in a democratic group? Various ways of relating opinions, includes victory by the majority, compromise and integration.

Majority view: When the vote is taken, the majority vote dominates over the minority. This is consistent with democracy and when the decisions must be an either-or type or are critical in nature, the majority decision should be accepted. In adopting a building design, one cannot mix styles of architecture to please all sides.

The dangers of this way are several. As mentioned before, the minority is revealed and this tends toward polarization. Other decisions may reflect this division and emotional loyalties may overrule rational choices. There is also the danger that the majority in their feelings of victory may suppress or ignore the minority's valid points. Permanent splits may occur and some may leave the group.

Compromise: Compromise is another ancient way of a small group arriving at a solution, in which both sides gain something but the conclusion may not be completely satisfying to either. In the majority view, one side gained, one side lost. Here both sides share in the gain. Most conflict situations in which church leaders find themselves are the type where "total victory" is not usually

possible. It becomes the leader's job to work out a "third plan" that will have value for both parties. While compromise is not the ideal method, it can serve to prevent splintering of the group until a more complete agreement can be arrived at. In case of emergency decisions, this may be the better approach than dividing the group on a delicate issue. Kemp believes that "compromise, adjustment, balance, accommodation,...characterize hygienic human relations both in the process of development and in the pursuit of goals."⁸³ Otto Rank also affirmed that when he said:

Life demands continuous partialization, and the well-adjusted man must always be ready to live by a continuous partial paying off, without wanting to preserve or give out his whole ego undivided in every experience.⁸⁴

The danger of each one giving in, in favor of a synthesis solution, is that, according to Benne and Muntyan, "the minds, the outlooks, and the perspectives of the conflicting groups" may be left "unreconstructed or at best partially changed."⁸⁵

Integration. In integration, all members win at all points and lose at none because a higher synthesis, or supra-goal, has been found to incorporate the best of all

⁸³Kemp, op. cit., p. 258.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 259.

⁸⁵Glanz, op. cit., p. 134.

viewpoints. In seeking a solution, Harrison Elliott suggests that the group should usually seek a new alternative rather than a choice from the possibilities at the beginning of the discussion. The new solution may incorporate facets of many possibilities or be an entirely new solution which has come to the surface. When time is available, the democratic approach favors a creative solution which gathers up the best contributions of all and conserves the values most important.⁸⁶ This may not always be possible, as in the case of either-or choices.

3. How to facilitate putting the decision into effect.

Harrison Elliott cautions that the work of the group is not done when the decision is arrived at. When a group concludes that a certain course of action is desirable or that a conclusion is valid, it must ask what the implications are for the minority opinions, or for future actions. Also, all may be lost if no plan for implementation is drawn up. In deciding the plan for putting the decision into action, the group should be careful to be consistent with democratic procedures. If the preferred solution turns out to be unworkable in the real life situation, the group must be ready to reexamine the solutions and find a workable one.⁸⁷

⁸⁶Elliott, op. cit., p. 59.

⁸⁷Ibid., pp. 60-2.

XII. EVALUATION

In the democratic small group, any program that permits actions of the group to become crystallized into habits which limits future change and promotes complacency must be rejected. Growth demands that the small group evaluate its actions in order that (1) judgments may be made about whether sought objectives had been attained, (2) reasons for success or failure may be studied to prevent future failures and to increase successes, and (3) meanings may be deducted to guide future decisions.⁸⁸ Evaluation can offer further help by causing participants to realize the importance for joint action and good interaction by responsible participation. The group should be aware of how far they have gone and what still remains to be done in future planning.⁸⁹

Various methods of evaluation are available for the small group to use. The leader may make his own evaluation at the close of the meeting. By using his own checklist he can share with the group from his experience and his point of view. Items which the leader will want to include in

⁸⁸Hollingshead, op. cit., p. 167.

⁸⁹Hollister, op. cit., p. 16.

his list are:

The situation in which the meeting was held.
 The atmosphere of the meeting.
 The sequence or movement of the meeting.
 The accomplishments of the meeting.
 Things that contributed to the accomplishments.
 My role as a leader.
 Plans for the next meeting.⁹⁰

Powell gives a comprehensive list of questions which a leader or group member might profitably use. If each member made such an evaluation, the group process would be helped.

D. M. Hall reminds us that the problem is not just one of evaluation, but better evaluation, which depends on:

1. A clearer understanding of the standards by which objects should be judged.⁹¹
2. A more dependable factual basis.⁹¹

The group members and leader should work together to provide these.

One device for evaluation which can be distributed to all participants is the "End-of-the-Meeting Evaluation Form."⁹² Completing the form helps to make the participants more conscious of the group process and more thoughtful about what part they play in the group. When a summary is distributed and discussed at the next meeting, the entire group may prosper. In this anonymous manner members

⁹⁰Powell, op. cit., p. 82.

⁹¹Hall, op. cit., p. 193.

⁹²Powell, op. cit., p. 86.

in a business meeting of the church may give frank responses knowing that their suggestions will receive group consideration.

Some observers prefer to use an interaction chart to preserve a record of who spoke to whom. Such charts are easy for the amateur observer to keep and in a small group may not be difficult to maintain. Circles represent the participants diagramed in their seating arrangement. Lines between the circles represent communication. Barbs or arrows on the lines indicate who initiated the communication. From these charts, frequency of verbal contributions by individuals can be recorded. The diagrams also provide an easy record of mutual response bonds by noticing who talked with whom, and who did not communicate with another member.

Evaluation can also be done in terms of the functions which individuals carried out. The seventeen functional roles of group members can be listed down the side of the page and the participants' names across the top. Functions can be divided between task-centered, group-centered functions and out-of-field functions.⁹³ Through this chart the group can see who is too aggressive or if the leader is short circuiting creativity by giving too many opinions

⁹³Ibid., pp. 98-100.

too early. Individuals may also get a revealing picture of their own role which can be of value in later performance. Participants should observe on this type of chart "the frequency of an individual's roles, the variety of roles he performed, and the appropriateness of these roles to the group's stage of progress."⁹⁴

Because these evaluation methods may be threatening to an inexperienced group, careful explanation should be made by the leader about the intention and use of these charts. The members need to see them as helps to better group and individual performance. If resistance comes, it will usually be from those who could profit most from the charts. If the majority favors their use, the few objectors are more likely to accept their use also.

Sometimes it seems helpful to have a few of the members stay after session for a talk-over period. This is sometimes dangerous to the group as a whole and probably would be more valuable if the group evaluated while they were together.

Carefully done, evaluation can be a great asset in effective group life. In controversial areas, it can bring out the feelings of all members and may help the individuals to see the pattern of some controversial figures.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 101.

CHAPTER V

CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR EFFECTIVE USE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

I. THE ROLE OF THE LEADER

Essential to the success of a small group is the leadership that works with the group in decision-making. Whether the group has an appointed leader, elected leader or one who arises voluntarily in the process of interaction, the role of the leader is significant. According to Frank Haiman, leadership refers to that process "whereby an individual directs, guides, influences or controls the thoughts, feelings and behavior of other human beings."¹ Raymond B. Cattell describes leadership as "(1) acts which help a group decide upon its goals and (2) acts which help it achieve these goals."² In the democratic process, the aim of the leader is to keep the channels of communication open so that thoughts and feelings may be fully expressed. Leadership involves interaction between the leader and the followers. The leader may be autocratic or democratic but

¹Franklyn S. Haiman, Group Leadership and Democratic Action. (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 4.

²D. M. Hall, Dynamics of Group Action. (Danville, Ill.: Interstate, 1964), p. 149.

unless some type of leader is present, there is anarchy. Paul Douglass summarizes the responsibilities of the leader as the "most responsible member of a purposeful group" who (1) encourages member behavior which advances the group's purpose, (2) utilizes the resources of the group in solving problems, (3) provides the participants with a satisfying experience, (4) utilizes technologies for group growth, and (5) assists in skill development of members.³

The first task of the leader in a democratically oriented group is to get the cooperative process underway. If the group has an assigned leader, the discussion will start earlier. Three purposes should be accomplished in the opening minutes.⁴ The leader should set the climate so that all participants feel at ease and ready to contribute freely. "Growth takes place in a free and permissive climate where the members of the group interact enough to get acquainted meaningfully with one another and seek to develop possibilities for communication."⁵ Next the leader should stimulate as much interest as possible in the coming decision or problem in a few words. Third, he needs to

³Paul F. Douglass, The Group Workshop Way in the Church. (New York: Association Press, 1956), p. 124.

⁴Haiman, op. cit., p. 167f.

⁵Justus E. Olson, "Group Life that Helps Persons." International Journal of Religious Education, XLII:3, (November, 1965), 6.

start the members talking together by asking specific questions that take more than a "yes" or "no" answer. It may take several searching questions to get the group moving.

In the democratic process, the leader is a co-learner with other members of the group. While he has specific duties as a leader, he does not carry full responsibility for the success or failure of the group. Each member is expected to share in some of the leadership roles.⁶

As the group moves along in the discussion, the leader should assume the responsibility for summarizing from time-to-time the direction in which the group is headed. When transitions are needed to bring the members back to agreed upon goals, the leader offers them. In doing so, the leader creates an environment which is most conducive to individual and group growth.

Once the discussion is moving, the leader performs the task functions when they are needed or he may ask the help of the recorder or observer. At times the group members may need to be reminded of how they are using their time. If the group tends to wander into irrelevancies and follow a path which will take it from the main concern, the leader points again to the goal. In church groups,

⁶Raymond Rigdon, "Responsible Participation." International Journal of Religious Education, XLII:3 (November, 1965), p. 8.

there is a tendency for the group to go off on to tangents which prolong the meetings. When a member is weak on expression, the leader may need to help draw forth the idea. The leader at times may ask information-seeking questions, test the validity of contributions, relate discussion to group standards, point out duplication or similarities or differences, help resolve differences or try to bring the group to a decision.⁷

A. FUNCTION IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The leader has a function to perform as members interact with each other. There are times when church groups take the direction of avoiding any conflict by acting as though they are unanimous. At this point, the leader can stimulate the group to recognize a superficial consensus or reexamine a faulty agreement. Because the democratic process is not perfect and persons will sometimes favor quick action and weak decisions, the leader should be suspicious of unanimity.

Usually we assume that part of the leader's function is to prevent emotional excess in the interaction of the group. At times he is called on to do the contrary, that is, to promote emotional involvement. Those who have done

⁷Haiman, op. cit., pp. 168-174.

research in group life now feel that "a certain amount of chaos is not only inevitable but desirable in a democratic group."⁸ At times even negative involvement is recommended, when the leader deliberately becomes inactive to frustrate the participants until they do something. Another way of promoting emotional involvement is to put one of the members under personal attack or by stimulating such an attack upon the leader. W. Randolph Thornton, Director of the Department of Administration and Leadership of the National Council of Churches, believes that sometimes the leader must present a crisis to get the group off dead-center. If a crisis does not come naturally, "it is legitimate for the leader to try to induce a crisis, provided he does so with genuine feelings and with altruistic motives."⁹ All of these techniques are fraught with danger and should be used carefully, else they may destroy the progress the group has made.

The democratic leader should also seek for the members to develop a mutual respect and understanding for each other.¹⁰ As participants get emotionally involved in a discussion, judgments come quickly and understanding slowly.

⁸Ibid., p. 136.

⁹Bruce Larson (ed.), Groups that Work. (New York: Faith At Work, 1964), p. 40.

¹⁰Haiman, op. cit., p. 141.

Unless an understanding atmosphere is achieved, feelings cannot be expressed freely. If there are those in the group who would destroy the dignity of the individual upon which democracy is built by their intolerance, they must be made aware of their disruptive influence or feel the social pressure of the group to conform.

A further interpersonal function which the leader is called upon to perform is reducing overdependence. When the members seek to abdicate responsibility for their problems, the leader should remove himself from the center of group activity and by his actions, let the group actually share the leadership roles.

The leader should also help to draw in the action the member who is not contributing and to check those who are overaggressive in their participation. One of the most taxing jobs the leader has is to quiet the talkative member without injuring his feelings. Yet if such a person is left unchecked, the group may "quarantine" him or reject him, which makes the situation worse.¹¹

B. HOW DIFFERENT LEADERS THINK AND ACT

Just as the attitudes of the members are important to the success of a democratic group, so the thinking patterns of the leader are instrumental in his effectiveness.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 144-148.

If the leader has a basic respect for other people, he will be sensitive to their needs and concerns. To do this sincerely, he must enjoy being with people and serving them. In applying social ethics to real life situations, this quality in church leaders is essential, both in relation to the people in the social situations being served and the members of the church who are to do the serving. Harry Overstreet recounts the case of a minister who found that he monopolized the conversation in a discussion in order to straighten out people who had wrong ideas. In evaluation it was pointed out that the minister did not really believe in the worth of discussion, was not ready to receive a new idea, but merely tolerated the method to make people think they were saying something important.¹² The leader must have a sincere belief in the dignity of the person. While one might assume that all church leaders would hold this attitude, it is not true.

Even empathy, considered by Murray Ross and Charles Hendry¹³ as one of the basic characteristics of a good leader, is not found in all church leaders and pastors. Empathy, that quality of feeling with another's feelings, needs to come through training and education. Different

¹²Ibid., pp. 116, 117.

¹³C. Gratton Kemp, Perspectives on the Group Process. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), p. 197.

kinds of leaders act differently in relating to other's feelings.

One of the important attitudes of the leaders regards his thinking about involvement. Many educators who have studied discussion groups insist that the leader must not take sides or express his personal viewpoint to the group. His position must be firmly neutral. Frank Haiman disagrees with this point of view. The leader should let his feelings be known because (1) honesty demands that he act as a human being and take a stand and because (2) the leader has great "assets which should not be sterilized by putting their possessor in a position where he cannot use them."¹⁴ The danger of losing the respect of the group by getting involved can be offset by the leader's relaxing his guard slowly as the group begins to show democratic responses.

Styles of Leadership. We have made references to various styles of leadership throughout this presentation. Now let us look at them in more detail. Research in group dynamics has shown several basic styles of leading, that is, ways in which participants in leadership positions attempt to carry out their responsibilities. Each style has its own assumptions about the role of leader, the

¹⁴Haiman, op. cit., p. 123.

responsibilities of group members and the process by which the group fulfills its task. If one were to make a continuum with an extreme at each end, at one end would be the autocratic leader who holds the controls in his hands and expects loyalty and obedience from the members. At the other end would be the leader who refuses to take initiative, who accepts any response from the members and remains idle until they act. In the middle would be the leader who shares both responsibility and power with the group members. Powell believes that in our churches there is also a fourth type known as the benevolent autocrat, meaning the leader who dominates by using praise, persuasion and other psychological rewards.¹⁵

Paul Douglass sees leaders as classified in three categories: the boss, the overseer and the catalyst.¹⁶ The boss dictates plans; the overseer cares for the details of others like a "loving" mother, while the catalyst seeks to create a climate for participation and reaction with room for the members to grow.

The three styles of group action, as described in chapter II, which have received most of the attention from

¹⁵Robert R. Powell, Managing Church Business through Group Procedures. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 136.

¹⁶Douglass, op. cit., p. 127.

researchers since the increased study of group life following World War II, are the autocratic, the democratic and the laissez-faire. The place that these three styles differ, states Gordon Lippitt, is in the location of the decision-making function.¹⁷ The controversy in areas of social action usually comes at the place of decision. Individuals may speak or preach about social issues as long as no action is proposed or taken. When the speakers try to become decision-makers, or to share in the process, autocrats find it hard to accept.

The location of the decision-making in the autocratic group lies with the leader who decides for the group what they will do. In the laissez-faire group the decision centers in no particular person but results from the efforts of those who grasp control of the group. The decision may represent a minority view point or it may be impossible to arrive at any decision for the group. In the democratic process, the decision-making function is located in the whole group with the leader helping the group members to formulate their decision through discussion.

a. Autocratic: In the authoritarian style of leadership the making of the decision is placed in the hands of

¹⁷Gordon L. Lippitt, Leadership in Action, 1961. (Washington: National Training Laboratories, 1961), p. 8.

one who is presumed to know better than the group. That person directs the behavior of others toward a predetermined end.¹⁸ The autocratic leader is usually one who relates poorly to others, who uses people to gain power for his own ego, who declines to develop leadership abilities in others for fear of competition, and who ignores the dignity of others.

The authoritarian leader in the church may occupy positions of executive leadership where one is paid "to get the job done," among the elders who may see themselves as judges settling church issues, in the advocate who tries to persuade the other members toward his religious viewpoint, or in the expert who feels his training or vocation qualifies him to give final answers to problems.

B. Democratic: The democratic style of leading is not complete freedom as some imagine, for that would be anarchy. Nor is it complete loss of freedom for that would be totalitarianism.¹⁹ Some freedoms are surrendered to the group and some retained. The democratic style of leader "epitomizes the values and norms of the group."²⁰

¹⁸Haiman, op. cit., p. 29.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 33.

²⁰George M. Beal, Joe M. Bohlen and J. Neal Raudabaugh, Leadership and Dynamics of Group Action. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1962), p. 33.

He perceives the direction in which the group is moving and moves more rapidly in that direction. He is out in front of the group, because of his foresight, but not so far ahead that communication breaks down. When conflict arises, he helps the group to resolve it. When differences are irreconcilable, his guidance helps the group to arrive at a majority decision.

c. Laissez-faire: Because this style of leadership is an abdication of what we think of as leading, I shall mention it only briefly. However, in church committees, this style of leadership is often seen. In this approach every member does what he wants, usually resulting in chaos. This style of leadership is recognized by the fact that the leader buries himself behind the administrative details and avoids facing the job of guiding the group. He fails to help the group discover a goal or purpose. Without a goal, the members usually have little desire to improve.

Reactions to these styles of leadership: In the authoritarian approach to leadership members are filled with fears, tensions, and insecurity. In small church groups, feelings are held in, hostility is repressed and members draw apart. Members compete to win the leader's favor. Usually members become over-dependent on the leaders

waiting passively for the chairman to lay out the program. This type of leadership inhibits growth and learning, leading to attitudes of apathy and fatalism. Being left mystified as to what his contribution will be in the decision-making process, the member stops participating, remembering that he will not likely receive any credit for whatever he does.²¹ Since the member is dependent on the leader for approval and ego-satisfaction, as well as for rewards, the members parrot what the leader wants to hear.

In fairness to this style of leadership, we must say that some people prefer to be led and are inspired by dictators. People try to imitate great leaders and choose their group life on the basis of the person who is the leader. Because many believe this style of leadership to be more effective, they practice it in the churches.

The laissez-faire style of leadership also invokes reactions from the members. Because there is no one taking the initiative to help the group form goals, the members lose their desire to grow. Conflict in such a group increases with much evidence of buck-passing, scape-goating, unrest, irritability and lack of team work.²² This aggressive behavior focuses on the leader or other members of the group.

²¹Lippitt, op. cit., p. 49.

²²Haiman, op. cit., p. 54.

The democratic style invites a different reaction. Positively the group leader helps lower tension and frustration. This frees the members to participate more actively and to express differences in the group. Feedback is welcomed and invited so that the leader knows what progress the group is making.²³ Criticisms of the leader are not rejected. When the group works out its own decisions, morale is higher, ego-satisfaction increases, responsibilities are accepted, and praise is exchanged.²⁴ Social action projects and involvement in social issues are more likely to be followed through because they represent the total group's action.

II. ROLE OF MEMBERS

In the autocratic group, the members look to the leader to tell them what their part is. In the democratic group, the leader looks to the members to make the group a success by fulfilling their responsibilities. Psychologists and sociologists believe that there is no longer any "group mind." Group behavior has its origin in the individuals and has its ultimate effect upon individuals. One should not think then of the group making a decision as

²³Alfred W. Gorman, The Leader in the Group: A Conceptual Process. (New York: Columbia University, 1963), p. 10.

²⁴Powell, op. cit., p. 141.

much as individuals joining their singular personalities to make the decision. Unless the participants in the small group in the church know their democratic role, they cannot fulfill it. A member in the local church will usually become involved in some type of group. If the member has average ability he will soon become part of one or more decision-making groups.

The personality of the members of the group will have a great influence on how democratic it can be. Since many persons in the church are used to living under an autocratic type of rule in home, business and school, the experience of participating in a democratic group may lead them to take advantage of the leader who permits freedom. Or if the members have been indoctrinated to expect super-human efforts from their leaders, they may be disappointed in a leader who does not abstain from many human temptations and does not hide his frailties.²⁵

A. VARIETY OF ROLES OF MEMBERS

The participants in a group have the obvious functions to fulfill such as being present at all sessions, contributing to the best of their abilities, remaining alert and giving the group full attention. In addition to

²⁵Haيمان, op. cit., p. 24.

these general functions, the member's roles can be divided into three categories: group task roles, group morale roles and out-of-field roles. The task roles are intended to move the group ahead on its task. The morale roles tend to build the group spirit of togetherness.²⁶ The out-of-field roles pertain to the inner needs of the members.

Task roles: These roles include members taking the initiative by introducing something new, elaborating by adding suggestions to ideas of others, seeking information or relevant facts, and giving information. One of the members' essential functions is to contribute ideas, facts and experiences to increase the data from which the group may draw its conclusions. If the participants through fear, apathy or indifference withhold pertinent information regarding the decision, they are being dishonest with the group and injuring the democratic process. Besides revealing data, the individuals seek to understand the relationship between all the facts presented. By raising questions regarding the data, a member may bring clarity for himself and probably others in the group.

Besides contributing data, each participant is expected to offer solutions which he perceives. Sometimes these will be made in the form of motions so that the group

²⁶Powell, op. cit., pp. 57, 58.

might act on them. At other times, the member's insights offered piecemeal may assist others in completing the solution which they offer. When his solution is offered, the participant should not be so wed to it that he stops thinking creatively about other solutions or demands immediate action on his answer to the problem.

To these may be added other functions, such as the member's contribution in seeking out opinions. By encouraging expressions of feelings and value judgments, it will be easier for the group to make a decision. Sometimes the member will sense that communications between other members are not getting the message across, at which point he can play the role of clarifier, and clear up misunderstanding. If ideas are too naively accepted, he can switch to the role of challenger by questioning the facts presented. When two members find themselves in conflict, participants can more objectively join the good in each into a compromise idea, thereby saving the ego of both members in conflict. Powell adds to these eleven other functions which members may perform: the orientor, the evaluator-critic, summarizer, the consensus tester, the feasibility tester, the orientation seeker, the position stater and the direction giver.²⁷ Most of these roles are explained in their titles.

²⁷Ibid., p. 62.

Morale roles: Roles which give a lift to the spirit of the group are known as morale roles. These are necessary to achieve and maintain a high level of group spirit. When group morale lags because of inner strife or apathy, the main task of the group may need to be set aside while the morale is rekindled. When controversial matters involving social issues arise, the morale of the total group may sag. Even those not directly involved may become disheartened by friction in the church and become inactive or lethargic. When a member helps to set group structure or rules of operation or calls for restructuring of the group, he is seeking to keep up morale and enthusiasm, at least his own. If a member makes an overture to another member or responds to another's initiative, an interaction bond is created and rapport grows. By encouraging another who is shy to participate, a member adds to total group spirit.

This role of one member helping another is an important one, too often overlooked in the church. The member who has joined his efforts with others to reach a common goal needs to understand his role in helping others to bring forth ideas. In that way he assists them in reaching their potential as individuals. He serves others which advances the whole group and fills his own psychological need to share himself. In the church this mutual helpfulness deepens the spiritual relationships between individuals.

When a member is too aggressive, a colleague may restrain him, thereby giving the group a balanced spirit. If the feelings reach the point of ignition, as is sometimes the case in practicing Christian social action, the harmonizer in the group goes beyond establishing a bridge between varying points of view and seeks to bring together the two persons in a working relationship. The conciliator also tries to harmonize conflicting persons but from the inside of the conflict since he is involved in the tension. At times a member may build morale by adding humor to a tense emotional scene. The group may also be reminded of its superordinate goals. At times these are overlooked when they should be strongly emphasized when dealing with controversial issues. These various morale-building roles are the kind most frequently seen in church committees.²⁸

In the area of morale building, the function of fostering spiritual growth in the group should be included. Those who conduct the processes of planning, evaluating and decision-making in the church should work to foster such growth.²⁹ Since the primary function of the church is to relate man to God and man to man, each member should endeavour to build relationships in such a way that this

²⁸Ibid., p. 66.

²⁹Ibid., p. 26.

basic purpose is reached. When Christians meet in small groups to undertake the work of the Kingdom, they can create a favorable climate for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The common search for the will of God in a democratic manner is the role of each member.

Out-of-field roles. Apart from the two types of roles mentioned are those which pertain to the needs of the participants. The individual in the group seeks primarily to meet the needs which he has. In the church's small groups, the member may see his presence in a group as performing a duty, as an opportunity for recognition, or as fulfilling his need to serve others. Hopefully, his presence in the group may help him to meet the higher spiritual needs of his life and not only the psychological needs. In decision-making groups, the members receive satisfaction out of helping the institution to do its work effectively and successfully. When the church group is able to carry forth its Christian mission, an inner satisfaction comes to members far beyond the institution's "success".

Included in this group of needs is that of recognition. When a member participates in a church meeting, just to get attention by excessive talking, boasting or offering extreme or tangential ideas, he has added nothing to the group. Sometimes a member will express hostility which he has carried into the meeting from another situation

and express it by attacking another's motives, belittling what someone has said, or deflating another's ego. Such "out-of-bounds hostility" destroys good interaction. When a member brings in his special interest at inappropriate times, he is pleading for special attention. If he retreats from participation through a disinterested or hurt attitude, he is acting an out-of-field role. If the member is slow at establishing new response bonds, he may try to prevent bond-building and would be acting another out-of-field role.³⁰

The members and leader should be on the alert for these out-of-field roles and deal with them as they appear. To ignore them does an injustice to the member filling that role when he has a need, and also will prevent the group from moving effectively forward.

B. INCREASING MEMBER'S EFFECTIVENESS

What can members do to increase their role effectiveness? In a small democratic group the member's participation either makes the group a success or failure. Much that has already been said applies to this topic but for the purpose of being directly helpful to group members, some practical implications are summarized here.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 68-72.

Members can help to fulfill their function by first creating a proper group climate for sharing. They can feel free to talk and take part, thereby increasing interaction. Even a handshake, a smile or a "hello" will help to create a bond with another person. As the session begins, each member should work to learn its purpose. Each member can enter into creating or revising the agenda. Keeping attention focused on the progress of the discussion and asking for clarification when ideas are not understood is another way of helping. All members should speak out clearly but avoid long speeches. They may keep in mind the various roles possible and work consciously to fill some. Group members can learn to listen to what others are saying and relate their contributions to previous offerings. Members should not expect perfection from others yet should work for high standards of group output.

In many ways there is an overlapping between the role of member and leader because at times members become leaders. As a member can see himself as an assistant leader all of the time, his attitude will increase effectiveness.

III. THE RELATIONSHIP AND INTERACTION OF LEADERS AND MEMBERS

Paul Douglass believes that "the interaction of group and leadership tends to determine the amount of growth

which participant individuals experience."³¹ If he is correct, then church groups should be vitally interested in this interaction. In an autocratic group, the leader's relation to the members is formal and separate. But in the democratic setting the leader is accepted as a member of the group and they react to him as they would to another member. When the leader is unsure of his role and shifts from autocratic to democratic and then back, the members are confused and cannot relate to him as a peer.

A. HOW RELATIONSHIPS ARE STRENGTHENED

If the democratic pattern of relationship is the desirable way, what can be done to strengthen that relationship in our small church groups? One way to firm up the relationship is by reducing the threat that might exist when the relationship begins. Each member wonders what role the leader will take: autocratic, democratic or laissez-faire? By setting out clearly a definition of his role, the leader can establish rapport with the members. If members do not agree with his definition, they may openly discuss this until an agreeable solution is reached. A few minutes in clarifying their roles may set the group on a firmer footing.

³¹Douglass, op. cit., p. 124.

As the members are coming to understand the role of the leader, both should agree on the responsibilities of the members to the group. As understanding is developed here, more harmony will result in the interaction.

Relationships are further strengthened by both members and leaders seeing clearly the goal for which they are aiming. Without basic understanding here, the group should not proceed. Where conflict arises over application of social ethics in programs of social action in the church, it may become evident that the group has not worked out a clear understanding of its purpose and method of reaching that goal. Rather than spending time disputing social ethics, it is best to return right to the question of basic purpose. When this is decided upon to the agreement of all members, some of the other problems will clear up by themselves.

When goals are agreed upon, but methods of reaching them are not accepted by all, there should be allowance for using different means to reach the end, if the group is willing to permit this freedom. The group should investigate to make sure that the means are morally and ethically consistent with the end goal.

By remembering to include the deep spiritual emphasis of Christian growth in church group life, we can strengthen the leader-member relation. Together they are

working to achieve what they jointly believe to be the will of God. In this triad relationship, their own parts take on more significance. When churchmen understand the basic nature of their interdependent lives and try to build the quality of their relationships, they open themselves to the influence of the spirit of the living God. Their sense of responsibility to each other and appreciation of each other increases, aiding in the solution of their problems. Both leader and member build a relationship of dependence on the other, sharing many of the common roles in the interaction process. As the relationship grows and the democratic procedure is followed, the leader needs to exert less of his authority as a leader. In this interdependent relationship, conducting the business of the church and making decisions becomes as spiritual an experience as Bible study and prayer together. By adding this spiritual dimension to decision-making, members and leaders see their work as something more than the housekeeping chores of an institution.

B. DEALING WITH CONFLICTS

One of the results of interaction between participants is that members will bring up points of view which are important to them but with which others disagree. When members cannot see a compromise or alternative solution, when they have a great deal of emotional involvement

with the idea they present, when the goals of the people implicated contradict each other, when honest differences appear in analyzing complex issues, when both are unwilling to consider points of view other than their own, conflict is inevitable.³² If the group is practicing democratic procedures, conflict is not a thing to be feared or repressed. As Lewis Coser explains it, "Whether internal conflict promises to be a means of equilibration of social relations or readjustment of rival claims, or whether it threatens to 'tear apart' depends to a large extent on the social structure within which it occurs."³³ When an internal crisis occurs, the event at least can cause the members to look again at their relationships to one another, and to grow in the process.³⁴ The group and leader should definitely not assume a laissez-faire attitude toward the conflict and permit it to become destructive.

1. Avoid unnecessary conflict. The first approach which the leader and group members can work together on is to avoid unnecessary conflict. While at times the group may need to be moved to recognize they are overlooking

³²James B. Coleman, Community Conflict. (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1937), p. 4.

³³Lewis A. Coser, The Function of Social Conflict. (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1956), p. 152.

³⁴Larson, op. cit., p. 38.

existing conflicts within, it is a dangerous practice to bait members to conflict. Several ways that conflict may be prevented are: (1) facilitating change in the group so that those who have taken a stand may gracefully shift their position, (2) developing qualities of leadership or communication which make change easier, (3) achieving among group members the proper skills that will smooth the process of change, and (4) practicing the type of ethics that maintains respect for members even when they hold divergent views. The leader can use some of his skills to get the group started without conflict and to keep the discussion moving positively. Fuller participation, clearer communication and reality testing are a few means. As negative feelings come out in small amounts, they can be dealt with before they build up into explosions. By keeping the channels of communication open, by encouraging mutual respect and understanding and by avoiding public censure, the leader can encourage change and will lessen harmful conflict.

As we seek to avoid unnecessary conflict, members should be aware of the two kinds of conflict: extrinsic and intrinsic. Both are generally present in any dispute. Intrinsic conflict is the rational, ideational or intellectual type. Extrinsic involves the psychological or emotional element. To prevent the intrinsic conflict, the

leader is called upon to possess analytical keenness.³⁵ He needs to be able to pinpoint issues quickly and accurately. The leader also needs intellectual consistency which gives security to group members in fulfilling their own roles. If the leader lacks self-confidence in his knowledge, frustration and conflict will develop. Because all leaders are not born with these qualities, all participants should work on learning how to acquire them.³⁶

In preventing conflict, the successful leader will remember that he is in the group to serve others. Helen Hall Jennings pointed out in her summary of experimental literature on leadership:

They (leaders) apparently earn the choice status of most wanted participants because they act in behalf of others with a sensitivity of response which does not characterize the average individual in a community...Analysis of behavior shows they are individuals who see beyond the circumstances of their own personal needs into the wider range of needs of their fellow citizens. By their conduct they go further than the majority of the population in relating themselves to others and in translating the needs of others into effective outlets.³⁷

As the leader manifests that concern for the group members, they will want to work toward the goal instead of spending

³⁵Haiman, op. cit., p. 181.

³⁶Murray G. Ross, and Charles E. Hendry, New Understandings of Leadership. (New York: Association Press, 1957), p. 43.

³⁷Haiman, op. cit., p. 115.

their time in conflict. The leader should therefore understand whether his own motives are to satisfy his ego or the needs of the group.

As the leader serves others successfully, he will deal with the emotional problems that arise, by using a great amount of empathy. While the authoritarian leader may ignore the feelings of others, the democratic leader "must maintain a sensitivity to the basic trends and moods of the group as a whole."³⁸ The quicker the leader perceives and empathizes with the feelings of the members, the less tension and conflict are likely to develop. In dealing with emotional problems, the leader will show consideration by leaning over backwards to avoid showing partiality. Especially is this necessary in giving proper consideration to minority points of view. Flexibility is another quality the leader needs in preventing conflict. Putting his own needs last, he will be able to deal with a variety of emotional feelings as they begin to arise. As he understands his own emotional needs and values, he will keep his ego separated from goals or objectives which might change in the group and become a threat to him.³⁹ If the leader has emotional inner-security, he will trust

³⁸Ibid., p. 118.

³⁹Lloyd Allen Cook, (ed.), Toward Better Human Relations. (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1952), p. 69.

the democratic process and will confidently handle conflict when it arises. As Alfred Gorman reports,

The leader has to accept his own skills and limitations as realities in the situation. More than others, he has to know the sorts of situations which cause him to become angry, for example, so that when he becomes angry he can tell what part of that feeling should be attributed to the situation and which part to his own personality make-up.⁴⁰

In these ways, the leader may prevent conflict when it would do more harm than good for the group.

2. First reactions to conflict: When conflict does arise in a democratically-oriented group in the church, it should be accepted. The members should try to separate the idea which the person presents from the person himself. The leader can help at this point by restating the objection in a non-personal way. When the group can listen with understanding instead of judgment, then resistance can help in clarifying the purpose, by showing inadequate communication existing in the group, by causing the group to take a second look at its goals, and by showing up inadequate problem-solving and decision-making processes in the group.⁴¹

After the initial reaction, the group should work together to clarify the nature of the conflict. Does it

⁴⁰Gorman, op. cit., p. 14.

⁴¹Thomas R. Bennett, II, The Leader and the Process of Change. (New York: Association Press, 1962), p. 41.

involve group procedures, content of discussion, personality differences or another area? The group needs to decide if the conflicting issue is something which it can decide or if the decision rests outside of the group. If the difference which arises is over facts, the group can seek more information. If it is over goals, the group can take a second look at goals. When the problem is over values, the leader can help to present both points of view in a description of values.⁴² When social ethics are involved, values are usually involved as well as goals which forces the group to struggle with the very roots of meaning. Basic definitions of the Church, the Gospel and how the mission is to be carried out are involved.

In the early stages of conflict, major attention should be given toward maintaining the relationships between the disputing parties, rather than dealing with the substance of the differences alone. Because there is no authoritarian power to suppress the conflict, these relationships must be maintained by group consideration instead of autocratic pressure. All members should now search for new vehicles of communication and should suggest procedures to facilitate an agreeable solution to the differences. Yet realism warns that "the ideal solution to a problem is

⁴² Haiman, op. cit., pp. 182-186.

almost never achieved, but some solution is eventually reached, and it is a solution with which everyone can live."⁴³

3. Try to integrate the group: There are three known ways of coming to agreement on a single course of action: (1) Force, (2) Arbitration, and (3) Integration. In the democratic process, the first two are not considered ways of resolving conflict. The democratic group will seek to maintain unity by way of integration. Haiman believes that this is the only true method of resolution.⁴⁴

To integrate, the members must be willing to change. If the disputing members do not all want to stay in the group, neither the leaders nor members can maintain the unity. If desire for separation becomes dominant, the question of the group's purpose can be raised. This may lift the discussion to a higher level where possibly some grounds for agreement may be found.

Discussion may be the method chosen to work out a solution to the difference, if the conflicting viewpoints are willing to discuss. Often this chance to air feelings will ventilate emotional buildup and give opportunity for each to present his view in a logical way. In the

⁴³Beal, op. cit., p. 35.

⁴⁴Haiman, op. cit., p. 181.

discussion, errors in perception or communication may be brought forth. Illogical prejudices may become obvious to the propounder. During this discussion, all should give attention and try to achieve clarity and understanding.⁴⁵

If the conflict is intrinsic, the group may find resolution through a "continual process of finding, isolating and clarifying the areas of agreement and disagreement."⁴⁶ Conflicts may occur over semantic problems, misinterpreted evidence, faulty reasoning or difference in values.

Integration may be achieved by drawing the group toward a higher common goal. Muzafer Sherif refers to these higher objectives as "subordinate goals." Through these goals a basis for communication and motivation for receiving new information is established.⁴⁷

If the conflict is extrinsic or emotional, the group needs to find a face-saving way for the loser to regain recognition and acceptance. Keeping the spirit of freedom and allowing time for the loser to regain his position may save loss of participation. When emotions are high, the members may try to objectify antagonistic contributions,

⁴⁵Gorman, op. cit., p. 55.

⁴⁶Halman, op. cit., p. 182.

⁴⁷Muzafer Sherif, In Common Predicament. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), p. 130.

delay controversy until emotions subside, interject gentle humor or change the topic. A recess may give time for exposed nerves to be covered.

In every situation of conflict the leader has some members who fill the role of "bystanders." These are individuals who do not enter the conflict as "partisans" and can be used to put pressure on the "partisans" to resolve the conflict.⁴⁸

4. Where Integration is Impossible: Even though integration is the only way to truly resolve differences, at times both parties cannot reach a solution. Sometimes the shortage of time, the lack of adequate facts, or the size of the problem may prevent resolution. At this point the group becomes aware that a consensus will not be possible without a vote. Polarization has taken place. While compromise, discussed previously, is still a possibility, both sides at this point feel they can win in a vote and may not wish to consider compromise. Members of the group have chosen sides and each side feels it can win. The group may take on a more formal structure as the leader presides, guiding the group in the process of decision-making by vote.

⁴⁸Edward O. Moe, Controversy and Conflict.
(Cincinnati: Board of Missions, Methodist Church, 1964),
p. 10.

Before the vote, both sides should be given an adequate hearing by the group. Fairness should be upheld. Sometimes in these final moments before the vote, leaders or members may make emotional statements which add nothing to the group and hinder future relationships. Statements about feeling "hurt", premature persuasion by trying to sway votes, advice-giving speeches by members or leaders, threats of punitive measures or withdrawal -- all are detrimental to the democratic way. As the leader avoids these techniques himself and urges others to do the same, a more mature decision can be made.⁴⁹

Once the decision is made, the leader or group should take steps to see that it is properly implemented. The leaders and group members should also seek to keep the group aware of the necessity of the entire group standing by majority decisions without continuous or immediate reconsideration if anarchy is to be avoided. At the same time, minorities need to be respected as full participants in future decisions and discussions.

⁴⁹Bennett, op. cit., pp. 37-39.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

I. DOES THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS WORK IN SMALL GROUPS IN THE CHURCH?

One of the aims of this study has been to determine the feasibility of using the democratic process in committees and other decision-making groups in the church. Some evaluative statements have been made in the course of this study. By summarizing these statements and pointing out some of their implications, the original question can be answered both "yes" and "no".

A. When democratic procedures work: This process is valid with small groups in the church setting when certain conditions are met. In fact, in our age of stressing freedom and democracy, this process is a necessity for renewal in the church. With the rise of the lay ministry, decision-making must move away from the authoritarian style or laymen will feel like second class citizens. The recent revival of the laity in which all members are recognized as ministers of Christ reaffirms that the future of the church is dependent on laymen learning about and fulfilling the church's mission through small groups inside and outside the church.

What are some of the conditions necessary to help these procedures work? One of the first conditions which the group must meet is to allow sufficient time. With the premium on church members' time in this age, wise planning needs to be done to allow time for proper decision-making. It is unrealistic to hope that decisions can be rushed through and still be democratic.

Moreover, even when time permits, unless the participants are trained and educated in the democratic process, they cannot apply it. A well planned program of education is necessary for all church members, or at least committee members and leaders, so that all understand the democratic method. This in itself involves time, effort and resources of trained personnel.

But even getting the facts of the democratic process across to group members is not adequate. The participants must understand and agree with the values of this method over other methods. Because many in the church come from homes and businesses where the autocratic method is accepted without question, a considerable period of retraining may be required.

Further, this process is feasible in the church when members have formed a Christian fellowship, when they have learned how and are willing to cooperate together. One would not expect this to be a problem in a Christian fellowship yet many large institutional churches are weak on

fellowship. When mutual respect for individuals is maintained, the democratic way is more apt to succeed.

The democratic way can be used in the church if stable leadership is available to help it be successful. For this process to work well, lay leaders and clergy alike will need to be developed to provide qualified leadership for groups. Because there are many intelligent and educated persons in our congregations, the problem is not inability but lack of skills. These may be taught if the members are willing to learn. Where the spirit is willing, this requirement does not seem too difficult. Methods of training will be mentioned later.

In the particular area of handling controversial topics in the church, it appears that the democratic method is the only realistic way. The laissez-faire method of dealing with such topics turns the group into chaos and break-up. The authoritarian method, whether used by liberals or conservatives, leaves some dissatisfied or resigning. The alternative is to use the democratic way. Each member has a chance to speak his mind, to present his facts as well as to hear the other side. In the final step of decision-making, each man has a vote which gives him equal voice in the decision. While the majority may not always be right, until they are convinced otherwise, through fair methods of presentation, they hold the power of the group and must act according to their beliefs.

B. When democratic procedures do not work: There are times when the democratic process will not be effective.

One of those times will be when emergencies arise. While the church may not have as many emergencies as a commercial enterprise, there are times when it must act in haste to prevent collapse of some part of its program. As long as the group is agreed on a quick plan of action, it is in some sense democratic even though it denies the careful analysis and study of the democratic way. If too many "emergencies" arise, calling for quick action, the church leaders might question whether matters are being rushed through to prevent complete study.

At other times, the group may need an authoritarian voice to compete with autocracy's immediate swiftness and decisiveness of action.¹ The word authority should not be feared where it is needed to preserve freedom. Firmness may be a needed attribute of leadership when the group is struggling to learn the democratic way; otherwise, chaos may result. It is not contradictory to democracy to have leaders making administrative decisions within the framework of group policy.

Moreover, the democratic way is not likely to be successful or workable in churches that follow and favor

¹Ralph K. White, and Ronald Lippitt, Autocracy and Democracy. (New York: Harper Bros., 1960), p. 276.

the authoritarian structures of church government. While the theological basis of their structure might be questioned, tradition may have so strongly bound their group to that method that change is unforeseeable. However, even strongly autocratic churches like the Roman Catholic Church are revamping their programs to permit more freedom by the laity. In a local congregation that professes the congregational form of government, there may still be patriarchal figures who resist the democratic way as "unsafe". The leading men's governing body, known in some churches as elders, may control all church policies through constitutional power or prestige. When that situation exists, there is often a demagogue or clique in that elected group which prevents it from operating democratically. More than a few churches which are considered successful, boast a pastor who approves all decisions, directly or indirectly. In such organizations, democracy is not possible.

When the feeling of fear, inferiority or apathy exists in a group, the democratic way does not work. Members who are serious and honest about the interaction in the group quickly learn that a stage will be reached where changes are required of them. Most people are resistant to change, especially if it demands that they initiate and carry through courageous new plans of action.² In the area

²Bruce Larson, (ed.), Groups that Work. (New York: Faith at Work, 1964), p. 33.

of social action, such changes may be like drastic surgery which no one anticipates eagerly. Without the atmosphere of acceptance, trust, openness and understanding, the democratic operation will not work. The members must be psychologically free to participate. "Democracy cannot be itself when the freedom to participate remains a mere form and when...most of the individuals remain alienated and isolated from the decision-making process."³ When apathy causes members to shirk responsibility, democracy cannot take root. "Democracy can flourish only if we accept the responsibility to plan the tasks which need to be undertaken."⁴

Further, democracy cannot succeed when leaders are untrained in their roles. Untrained leaders soon mean bored, hostile, or frustrated group members. Since church leaders are often elected or appointed by those outside the group, untrained leaders may be appointed for political reasons. Those in the group familiar with the democratic process may hesitate to tell the leader how to operate the group.

The size of the group may also make it impossible to operate under democratic procedures. When the group

³White, op. cit., p. 246.

⁴D. M. Hall, Dynamics of Group Action. (Danville, Ill.: Interstate, 1964), p. 74.

is too large for face-to-face interaction, group procedures cannot be democratic in the same sense. This is a good reason for keeping decision-making groups in the church small, letting them bring recommendations to the larger groups.

Finally, when the mission of the church is not clearly grasped, it is difficult to use democratic procedures. Some may see the church as a country club, a status-providing society or a chance for them to express ego-needs to be autocratic. Others may see the church as a business, to be operated like their businesses. Unless the church sees its mission to seek the will of God, through cooperative working together with respect for the dignity of each individual, the basic motive for the democratic method is gone. When the group members do not see the social action program as being related to the church's mission, they will attempt to restrain any decisions which would involve the congregation in social change.

II. WHAT KINDS OF GROUPS IN THE CHURCH CAN BENEFIT FROM THIS PROCESS?

Many types of groups can use the democratic process in the church. Robert A. Edgar mentions four: (1) task-centered groups such as boards, officers' groups, ushers, functional committees where most laymen get involved; (2) person-centered groups discussing the meaning of the

Christian faith; (3) study groups where doors are opened to a deeper understanding of the Good News; and (4) mission groups where individual or unit service is given for missions.⁵ The primary concern of this study has been with first type, for this is usually where the democratic process is used least.

Once the church sees the value of the democratic process with all types of groups and begins to use it with small decision-making groups, the mutual bond relations felt in person-centered groups will be felt in the task groups. It is important that democratic procedures be used in the task groups because here decisions are made which affect the lives of all members and the goals of the church. Decisions about the use of church funds, for example, may shape the course of the future of the congregation affecting each member. That is sufficient reason to have the fullest and fairest participation.

III. HOW CAN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS BE PRACTICED MORE?

Proper planning is necessary if we are going to use the democratic way more often in the church. It is assumed if the church leaders would plan an educational

⁵Robert A. Edgar, "Groups New -- or Revitalized." (International Journal of Religious Education. XLII:3 November, 1965), p. 11.

program to overcome present shortcomings in present church groups, the church life would move in the direction of increased democracy.⁶ In the week-by-week pursuit of the Christian goals, learning is a desired outcome of the decisions made. If learning is not planned for, it may be that such learning is taken for granted or because no one knows how to do such planning.⁷ When groups specifically plan for democratic action, learning is more likely to take place. Because of the significance of the individual in the church, church democratic groups "are more interested in deliberate and systematic education than other communities have cause to be."⁸ The church has more at stake than commercial enterprises in promoting democracy and should do better planning.

Democratic action is more apt to be practiced in churches when the members are convinced that unity, swiftness and decisiveness are not limited to the autocratic method. By placing an equal emphasis on responsibility as well as freedom, members can be trained to increase their efficiency and still be democratic. While members enjoy

⁶Mary S. Lyle, Adult Education for Democracy in Family Life. (Ames, Iowa: Collegiate Press, 1944), p. 105.

⁷Bruno Lasker, Democracy Through Discussion. (New York: Wilson, 1949), p. 34.

⁸Herman Harrell Horne, The Democratic Philosophy of Education. (New York: Macmillan, 1932), p. 110.

their freedom of speaking and discussion when they are in the minority, they should also be aware of their obligation to go along with the majority in the realm of action. By remembering the distinction between independent thought and cooperative action, democratic freedom can be preserved without hampering the efficiency of getting cooperative decisions made promptly.

Another way of getting democratic action into the reality stage is by using evaluation. Rarely do church groups take a look backward, except for the formal reading of the minutes. Even an analysis of these would be enlightening. A church board or committee could use a process observer in their sessions and ask him to report on how the group did its work.⁹ A survey of which group members fulfill which functional roles could be made. Members can take turns observing the group or even observing outside groups where the threat is not so great. Tape-recorders can be used to help the group evaluate its methods before and after the decisions have been made. Evaluation is associated with measuring the success of procedures used. The degree to which democratic procedures are used may be a measure of its success, and a means of practicing them more. Is there an increase in group consciousness?

⁹Robert R. Powell, Managing Church Business Through Group Procedures. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 154.

Have new attitudes and better ability in effective thinking come forth? Have actions been more cooperative? Are conflicts and hostilities handled better? Are more members participating freely?¹⁰

Another way to encourage the democratic process is to let the group members enjoy it. When they see how it improves their business sessions and increases participation, they will want to practice it more. Resistance will diminish and those who were previously doubtful will change their minds.

When group members understand how changes occur in group and individual patterns of behavior, they will have a greater appreciation of the democratic method. Churches which draw persons from diverse backgrounds with diverse motivations should realize the need for the best approach to harmonizing differences. A grasp of the psychological-sociological reasons for change will make change easier. As democracy gets into the bones and muscles of the participants from practice of this method, its survival can be anticipated.¹¹

¹⁰Arthur D. Hollingshead, Guidance in Democratic Living. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1941), pp. 217-220.

¹¹George B. de Huszar, Practical Applications of Democracy. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1945), p. x.

IV. TEACHING DEMOCRATIC METHODS

What kinds of programs can be set up to teach democratic group methods in the church? Unless some regular means are established for propagating the democratic way in the local church, it will not come spontaneously. The reason for this is the great tradition and habit of using autocratic methods in other areas of life. A man who grows up in an autocratic home, then takes education in an autocratic school, from which he enters an autocratic office, is not likely to seek democracy in the church, especially when it is organized autocratically. His indoctrination will orient him to apathetically accept the type of group structure he finds. Some businessmen are receiving training in the group process which may be carried over into church activities. But the proportion is relatively small. The few who come to appreciate the democratic style of leadership may be the nucleus to cause change in the church. However, without a program of action, these few cannot be effective agents of change. As W. Randolph Thornton says, it may take a crisis to move the group into change.¹²

A. Personal study: One way to begin a program of change is through personal study. By making available the

¹²Larson, op. cit., p. 36ff.

types of books found in the bibliography, new insights may come to church leaders, opening the door to further progress. This method may plant seeds for broadening interest in the democratic approach. The church library should include a number of books explaining the democratic group process and these can be supplemented by a list of books available in the local library. If the pastor is oriented in the democratic way, he may place some of these books in the hands of key laymen.

Besides books, periodicals such as the International Journal of Religious Education may be culled for pertinent articles. Personal study may come prior to group study or it may take a group study to stimulate interest in personal reading.

Much of the literature which is available to the public school or other educational institutions may be re-interpreted for use by the church. Excellent texts are available from the field of business where the democratic style of leadership has been studied in laboratory schools. This general field of literature on group life should not be overlooked.

B. Training programs: In trying to establish a training program there are various types of organized learning experiences which can be used. Those in the social sciences have proved that "people can learn new skills of

leadership -- particularly skills that facilitate learning and creative thinking in discussion groups."¹³

Kenneth D. Benne suggests three principles which should guide a church in establishing training programs. First, leadership can be learned by group members only as they practice the skills of group work. Opportunities should be given for actual use of skills in a variety of group settings in the church. Second, to assure that leadership functions are understood, frequent evaluation is necessary. When the group is experiencing frustration over lack of progress, turn to evaluation. Third, a free and permissive atmosphere where ego threat is minimal is necessary to try new patterns of relationships. Otherwise a lack of confidence will cause resistance.¹⁴

Training experiences include conferences for laymen and clergy, separate or together, seminary courses for ministerial candidates and clergy, short courses in the local church or interdenominational training, and spiritual life retreats. An annual forum for the entire congregation devoted to making church operations more democratic would help.¹⁵

¹³C. Gratton Kemp, Perspectives on the Group Process. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), p. 272.

¹⁴Winifred E. Bain, et. al., Democracy in Education. (Washington: Association of Childhood Education, 1948), pp. 30-31.

¹⁵Lyle, op. cit., p. 106.

An increasing number of conference experiences are available for churchmen. Some of these are of the secular variety as the National Training Laboratory at Washington, D.C. or at Bethel, Maine. Branches of these are held throughout the nation. These draw together persons of different vocations for an intensive two week experience in learning the democratic process by experience. Adult classes in the public school system may be willing to offer courses in democratic group leadership.¹⁶ Usually the quality of these non-church experiences exceeds that of the church sponsored training because top quality leadership can be secured through higher tuitions or commercial subsidization. However, because of the expense and time involved, it is difficult to get the average church member to attend these conferences. Shorter week-end or summer experiences may be arranged either on an inter-church basis or for one local church. The education department of the local church can plan regular study courses for adults, especially group leaders or potential leaders. They should formulate training objectives to be accomplished over a period of several years. "An adult education program should be organized and conducted in such a way that adults experience democratic procedures and become aware of

¹⁶Ibid., p. 109.

choosing procedures in terms of democratic ideals."¹⁷

The second type of conference approach includes only the clergy. Because of the possibility of meeting during the week-days this sometimes proves more convenient for an extended study. Also, because the clergy share a particular role in the church groups, their needs are similar. Unless the type of conference is of excellent quality, many clergy will avoid the experience because of demands on their time and their own resistance to change. A preparation of breaking through preconceived ideas about group process may be necessary with the clergy in that some have had small doses of group process which have inoculated them against the real thing. Then there is the fact that clergy suffer the same fears, frustrations, and ego-satisfying needs that others have. If they are autocratic leaders, they may abhor coming close to the democratic way. Once clergy come with an open attitude, the greatest hopes for change in the local church are possible. Being the most influential personality in the local church, the pastor is better able to persuade others of the value of the democratic way. His voice in program planning will make it easier to set up courses in the local church and to persuade others to participate in training experiences.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 125.

Those who have taken this training, as one hospital chaplain did, say that it had "the significance of conversation."¹⁸ Another described his experience as "the turning point in his life." Others felt it enabled them to minister to one another's needs and to be free themselves. Many believed their own leadership skills improved.

Seminary training experiences for ministerial candidates as well as clergy in continuing training can be effective in bringing to clergy an involving experience in democratic decision-making. Since the seminary menu is often cafeteria in style, only a small percentage select this type of training in the course of their preparation for the ministry, even though dealing with groups will occupy a major amount of time in their ministries. Churches sensing a need for training in this area may delegate their pastor and/or lay leaders to take such training.

Local church courses for its leaders is a further way of providing training. Leaders skilled in group work may be guest directors from seminaries, colleges or group laboratories. Adequate funds should be budgeted for such a program so that outstanding leaders will participate. A weak program of training may develop negative attitudes

¹⁸Justus E. Olson, "Group Life that Helps Persons." (International Journal of Religious Education. XLII:3 November, 1965), p. 7.

toward the democratic approach and destroy interest in further study. Powell suggests a strong outline for such a local training program in chapter ten of his book.¹⁹

William Hollister outlines a method of using "circle within circle" training in the local church.²⁰ Similar materials are available from the Department of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches and individual denominations. Such training programs should use the democratic style in their method of teaching.

Besides training in decision-making groups, church members may also carry over ideas and methods about the democratic process learned in other church groups, such as learning, spiritual life, or social groups. Howard Keeley records that one member of the church complained, "There is no opportunity in brief business meetings to really know the other person and understand his needs."²¹ This can be overcome by developing bonds in other church groups which carry over to decision-making. The local church should not overlook the value of this transference as sometimes persons will be more receptive to the democratic way in areas other than decision-making. Robert A. Edgar

¹⁹Powell, op. cit., p. 147ff.

²⁰William G. Hollister, Group Participation Methods. (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1950), p. 21.

²¹Larson, op. cit., p. 52.

explains how listening groups can provide an accepting atmosphere where interaction and acceptance can take place.²² As persons undergo change in the listening group, they will react differently in decision-making groups.

Church leaders should not be fooled into thinking, however, that by acquiring a few ready-made techniques the job is done. Democratic leadership involves the whole person, including his basic attitudes and values. In training the group to follow the democratic way, fundamental changes must be made in the inner core of the personality. Such changes come through frequent exposure to new situations, through a kind of painstaking experimentation with different methods, and through honest examination and evaluation of one's attitude toward self and others.

C. In-service Training Experiences: In thinking about opportunities in the local church, it may be impossible to interest or include the majority of decision-makers in a special training course. A supplement to that approach is to bring into already functioning decision-making groups opportunities for experiencing the democratic method. Monthly board meetings, committee meetings or subgroups may be willing to spend part of their meeting time

²²Robert A. Edgar, "Groups Organized for Listening." (International Journal of Religious Education. XLII:3 November, 1965), p. 46.

in learning the democratic process. Using feedback techniques, evaluation charts, observers and recorders are just a few ways to stimulate the group to analyze its method of operation. Teachers may be instructed in this process to help them apply this method in the education classes for children so that they begin early to understand the democratic way.

Another approach to in-service training is to hold an annual meeting for teaching new church members and refreshing old members on the procedures of the democratic process. Over a period of time, these approaches will build a base of members who are educated and trying to practice the democratic method.

A church might find it possible to bring in a skilled leader who could work with church groups over a period of time while they go about their routine work. Because such an adviser would have no official standing in the group in relation to the decisions, he could contribute objective analysis for the group's edification. Alex Bavelas and Kurt Lewin conducted such training at a summer camp program, experiencing through the retraining of the leaders a reversal from a 70% autocratic to a 90% democratic style of leadership.²³ The local church could use such a program.

²³Franklyn S. Haiman, Group Leadership and Democratic Action. (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 220.

When the local church begins to draw upon the potential power that now is unused in the members through the democratic process, it will discover other ways to put this method to work and to train the leaders in its use.

V. DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES AND SOCIAL ACTION

Throughout this dissertation various comments have been made about the relation of the democratic process to the church's program of social action. In recent years, this has become a controversial area in the life of the churches. As liberal leaders have worked to get the church involved in the problems of everyday life, conservative voices have warned the church to limit its function to worship and education. Rapid changes in society on the national scene, especially in the area of civil rights, have found local congregations and denominations divided over the role of the church in today's world. Churches speaking out on the topic of international relations has been disturbing to a large number of Christian church members. So far there has been little written about the method of resolving this critical division of emphasis in the church's program.

One answer might be to turn to the democratic process presented in this paper as the hope of reconciling the different points of view and of maintaining the body

of the Church. Some would argue that the separation must come and that reconciliation of two great divergent viewpoints can be only temporary. This is especially true when basic political or economic interests are involved. They would point to the concept that only a remnant of the body of the church will have the vision to see the true role of the church. But if we believe that the role of Christ is also to reconcile, then we cannot ignore the viewpoint of those who differ from us. The democratic way seems to be one way to achieve that. In the democratic way we not only gain new data which may make us more appreciative of those who differ but in following this way we learn that conflict is not bad and may be quite helpful to our growth, when it is constructive. The democratic process offers the freedom to share openly what we believe and to believe what seems right to us, but at the same time, provides the vehicle for keeping diverse ideas from separating persons. By having such a method and environment in which conflict can honestly and sincerely be faced, there is hope that the church need not retreat in silence or blow apart from internal disturbance. As the church can learn to share democratically on decisions in other areas of its operation, so it can learn to use the democratic process in discussing the controversial issues of our time. The autocratic and laissez-faire methods offer no hope at all in the solution

of this problem. Both may intensify conflict: in the autocratic because hostility against the leader is directed against others inside or outside the group, and in the laissez-faire the hostility and frustration cause internal aggressiveness against other members. The democratic seems to offer tremendous possibilities which we have not yet tapped.

What would we do differently in social witness if we put this method into operation in the local church?

1. We would need to begin thinking of prophecy as coming through the group, instead of individuals apart from groups. The prophetic individual may speak in the group to present the facts as he understands them to the members. But the power of the prophet would be in the group. Such prophetic utterances would then have the power of the group, along with its wisdom and balance.

2. The group would act only after full consideration of all facts and opinions. Acting in haste leaves out points of view. The goals would be more comprehensive and long-range so that they would contribute more to the changing process.

3. The group would speak only for those who took part in the discussion. It is autocratic to speak for others. The advantage thought to be gained in supposedly speaking for others is lost when the others will not support

the decision they have not helped make. Future powers of such spokesman are decreased with the group which resents being misinterpreted. In this process, all would be encouraged to contribute to the decisions so that all points of view would be included and the decision built on a broad base.

4. The local church groups would need to develop procedures for involving more persons in the decisions. When that happens, decisions are more likely to be followed through, even though they may be more conservative than liberals would like and more liberal than conservatives desire. The group would, however, move together giving a chance for attitudes to change in the group. Interaction cannot take place if the group divides and separates. Without such interaction, church wide polls are not representative.

5. The prophetic role of the preacher would shift from the pulpit to his influence in small groups. Instead of the shotgun methods of utterance from the pulpit with little resulting change in program and with no chance for interaction from members of differing viewpoints, the minister would use the rifle method of sharing his aims and ideas in the small group. If the group shared his ideas, then it would speak in action forms, which would remove the common "preacher versus the congregation" situation.

This has the advantage of helping the laymen to be prophetic which seems more Biblical.

In the small group, the minister receives feedback which is not possible in the pulpit, helping him to know if his ideas and methods are effective. While this method may seem slower or more confining to the preacher who thinks of himself as prophet, in the long range effect, he may accomplish more and be in the service of the congregation longer to witness some of the changes he proposed.

VI. THREATS TO THE DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES IN THE CHURCH

In bringing these conclusions to a close, something needs to be said about current threats to the future of the democratic process in the local church.

One of these threats is the increasing amount of centralization which occurs in church structures. While this may be a pattern that institutions and governments follow as they grow older or larger, it does present a problem for the democratic process. As the decision-making process moves farther to the top of the organizational ladder, the individual at the bottom recedes in importance. While representational democracy helps to bridge that gap, and realizing that institutional bigness may make it necessary, it still must be recognized for its

effect on the individual member. Part of the conflict at the grass roots in the questions of social action in the churches comes from programs based on decisions at the top greatly separated from the opinions of the common church member. For this reason, the National Council of Churches has been highly criticized, even though it follows a representative democracy. Like other institutions, churches move to more, not less, structure as they grow older. Such moves, if they take away the decision-making from the grass roots, destroy the democratic process. Walter Lippman believes that a man should settle for such a "spectator democracy" where the individual is a referee instead of a decision-maker.²⁴ Some local churches are already in that condition which causes apathy in the interest of the members. When the members convince themselves that they are helpless to take part in the big decisions, when they fail to get the facts or to communicate with one another, the democratic procedures fall victim to apathy. In the area of social action, involvement must become real by decisions being made in the local church setting with information and leadership supplied from both local and higher level church structures. By assuming responsibility for problems before crises develop in our churches, by cultivating the talents

²⁴Dean C. Barnlund, and Franklyn B. Haiman, The Dynamics of Discussion. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1960) p. 358.

needed to properly govern the local church and face social issues, by getting involved so as to feel the satisfactions which come from democratic participation, by increasing our understanding of social problems through better use of mass media, and using "moral courage, intellectual responsibility, infinite patience, and interpersonal skills of a high order,"²⁵ we shall be able to establish the democratic way as the best means of decision-making.

A second threat to the democratic process in the local church comes in the secrecy that is found in decision-making in some churches. Where a small group makes the key decisions, they may conceal their operations in a veil of secrecy to preserve harmony in the congregation. Decisions handed down without the members knowing whether all the facts were considered or why other solutions were rejected, leave some dissatisfied. When the controlling group acts autocratically in relation to the rest of the church body, members have a right to complain. Especially in an area of controversy such as social action, unless the issue is open and all can participate, the ruling autocrats will usually seek to preserve the status-quo.

A further threat to the democratic way is the threat of those who leave the group when the decisions do not go

²⁵Ibid., p. 372.

their way. Some leaders of congregations are more willing to sacrifice democracy than to lose members of the church. To them, the church fails if anyone withdraws. In disagreements over social problems in the last decade, some churches have been split. Rather than face this possibility, some members would rather avoid the basic involvement of the church in social issues. The democratic way is threatened if their attitudes persuade the majority that democracy is too dangerous. This means that uncooperative minorities are vetoing the power of the majorities. Even some pastors face the threat that facing social actions democratically may lessen the size of their congregations and make a poor showing on the report to church headquarters. Desired success in church statistics may also then be a threat to the democratic way. If we really believe in the democratic process, we will understand that it builds a stronger unity in the congregation which eventually builds a stronger congregation in fulfilling the mission of the church. In this way, the democratic process helps the church be the church in the most effective way.

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